

The Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy in Taiwan
—Influences on policy and practice

Ling-Ying Lu

**A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

The University of Edinburgh
August 2010

Declaration

I declare that:

1. This thesis has been composed by me
2. This work is entirely my own
3. This work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification

Signed:_____

Ling-Ying Lu
25th March 2010

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Li-Chu Wu and Yu-I Lu, my sister, Chen-Ying Lu and my husband, Ming-Jun Chen.

Acknowledgements

I completed this thesis with the kind help and the wise guidance of many people whom I am indebted to.

I want to express my gratitude to my supervisors, Professor David Raffe and Dr. Lorna Hamilton for their guidance in the four-year process of this study. Their encouragement and support made me have the courage to explore many exciting ideas and to develop an equally exciting work on my own. I also want to thank Professor Jenny Ozga for kindly providing me with many advices in the PhD progression board.

I am indebted to all of my interviewees who are devoted to the education in Taiwan in the Ministry of Education, the local educational authorities, the schools, and various reform groups for spending time and making effort to answer my questions and share their experience with me.

My heartfelt thanks also go to my friends for their supports from their challenging discussions, problem-solving conversations, and their patience with my questions and murmuring. They include Wen-Ting Chung, Wan-Hsiu Sunny Tsai, Chiao-Lan Feng, Li-Fen Wu, Sheng-Ching Chen, Wei-Ning Wu, and Shiao-Fu Huang. A special thanks to Professor Ying Shih, who cultivated and encouraged the passions for a better education in me.

Finally, I want to thank my parents, Li-Chu Wu and Yu-I Lu, and my sister, Chen-Ying Lu for their unconditional support for me to be myself; and I want to thank my husband, Ming-Jun Chen, for making my life and the pursuit of dreams more wonderful.

Abstract

This research aims to explore the attempted implementation of mixed ability grouping in junior high schools in Taiwan and the challenges generated by individuals and groups to this policy. The mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan has been disputed for nearly thirty years, but the disputes have never been examined from a wider perspective that considers the evolution of the policy and the contexts the policy process resides in. This study thus attempts to understand the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy from a contextualised, politicised, long-term perspective within which not only the ideological and practical debates, but the contexts that shape the conflicts over time, are taken into consideration.

The study is grounded in an analytical framework that allows for the exploration of the politically-driven mainstream educational ideologies, the power relationships between policy actors, and the cyclical policy process. The research methods adopted consider the timeframe, the contexts, the multiple policy actors and the interactions among policy actors and between contexts and policy actors within the policy. Documentary analysis is adopted to trace the policy process, the conflicts within, and the political, cultural, economic and societal contexts of the policy from its inception to today whilst a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews are utilized to understand the attitudes and actions of educational authorities and school educators. Case studies are conducted in two junior high schools in order to learn about the dynamics, the conflicts, and the considerations of grouping practice within individual schools.

The key findings of this thesis are as follows. First, the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan has existed through two different political regimes, within which the different mainstream educational ideologies and power distribution among policy actors contribute to

the distinctive policy process, interpretations of disputes and patterns of conflicts. Second, although the first-line educators recognise the advantages of mixed-ability grouping regarding discipline and resource distribution, their perceptions of pupils' ability and teaching are in line with the assumptions of streaming, which contribute to educators' conflicting attitudes and actions towards the mixed-ability grouping policy. Third, the senior high school entry system and the actions of parents and junior high schools together shape a hidden educational market within which the 'disguised forms' of streaming, such as the establishment of special classes, are valued by market players. The senior high school entry examination also profoundly influences educators who internalise the values embodied in the examination and perceive pupils' ability and their own teaching mainly in terms of examination results.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Preface.....	xii
Definition of terms used in this research.....	xv
Streaming (tracking).....	xv
Setting (ability grouping).....	xv
Mixed-ability grouping	xv
Policy	xv
Policy actors	xv
Chapter 1 : Introduction.....	1
1.1. Outline of the Chapters	8
Chapter 2 : Literature review and analytical framework.....	12
2.1. Mixed-ability grouping in education.....	12
2.1.1. The main issues of grouping practice: effects and inequality	13
2.1.2. Implementation research on the adoption of mixed-ability grouping and different research perspectives.....	19
2.2. Scope of educational policy research.....	39
2.2.1. Educational policy research: different perspectives, different research scopes.....	39
2.2.2. The Policy Process Conceptualisation	45
2.3. Analytical framework rearticulated and research questions	55
Chapter 3 : Research method	57
3.1. Research Design Overview	57
3.2. Understanding the contexts: collecting documents.....	62
3.3. Investigating the evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy: collecting documents, a questionnaire survey, semi-structured interviews, instrumental case studies.....	63
3.3.1. Ethical Guidelines	65
3.3.2. Documents collected for understanding the evolution of the policy	66
3.3.3. Pilot survey and interviews	72
3.3.4. A questionnaire survey of school principals	73
3.3.5. Instrumental case studies of two schools	74
3.3.6. Interviewing officers in two local educational authorities.....	82
3.3.7. Interviewing educational officers in the Ministry of Education	83
3.4. Data analysis	86

3.4.1.	General analysis procedures.....	86
3.4.2.	The direction of data analysis	88
3.5.	Validity	90
3.6.	The Role of Researcher: Reflexivity.....	92
Chapter 4 : The evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy—transformed contexts, process, and contested issues		95
4.1.	The autocratic regime, the autocratic education system	96
4.1.1.	Political era: nation-centred educational ideology	96
4.1.2.	The education state: central-control and administrative-control.....	100
4.1.3.	The policy cycle in the Martial-Law period.....	102
4.2.	After the abolition of Martial Law: the start of deregulation.....	113
4.2.1.	Political era: deregulated society, deregulated education	113
4.2.2.	The education state: an expanded education state with new power relationships	119
4.2.3.	The policy cycle in the post-Martial Law period.....	124
4.3.	The Political Space in the policy process.....	143
4.4.	The transformation of the contested key issues	145
4.4.1.	The perceptions of pupils' ability.....	145
4.4.2.	The perceptions of teaching in mixed-ability group	148
4.5.	The influence of the senior high school entry system.....	151
4.5.1.	The evolution of the senior high school entry system.....	151
4.5.2.	The influence of the senior high school system on the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy today	162
4.6.	Summary	167
Chapter 5 : The governance of the policy —the Ministry of Education and the local educational authorities		169
5.1.	The power structure and the style of policy governance.....	169
5.1.1.	The rationale of the mixed-ability grouping legislation.....	171
5.1.2.	The characteristics of the legislation and the implementation plan	173
5.2.	The governance of the Ministry of Education.....	178
5.3.	Local politics—the governance in Middle Line County and Sunrise County	182
5.3.1.	The situation faced by the local educational authorities	183
5.3.2.	The practice of the local educational authorities.....	187
5.4.	Discussion and Summary	191
Chapter 6 : The attitudes and the perceptions of the mixed-ability grouping		

policy of school principals: questionnaire survey results	193
6.1. Introduction	193
6.2. Sample.....	194
6.3. Findings.....	194
6.3.1. Attitudes towards the advantages and the disadvantages of the mixed-ability grouping policy.....	194
6.3.2. The recommended grouping practice.....	200
6.3.3. Teaching in mixed-ability groups.....	203
6.3.4. The practice of schools.....	205
6.3.5. The barriers to implementation	210
6.3.6. The influence of the senior high school entry system.....	212
6.4. Summary	215
Chapter 7 : A passive resistance—the policy practice at Pinewood Junior High	218
7.1. Basic information about Pinewood Junior High	219
7.2. The general grouping practice in Sunrise County and the controversies	219
7.3. The educators	222
7.4. Educators’ attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy.....	227
7.5. The current grouping practice and decision-making concerns	232
7.6. Educators’ perceptions of the senior high school entry system and policy practice	237
7.7. Educators’ perceptions of pupils’ ability, teaching, and the practice of the policy.....	239
7.7.1. The perceptions of pupils’ ability and policy practice	240
7.7.2. The perceptions of teaching in mixed-ability groups and policy practice	245
7.8. Summary	248
Chapter 8 : A conditioned implementation—the policy practice at North Creek Junior High.....	250
8.1. Basic information about North Creek Junior High	251
8.2. The general grouping practice in Middle Line county and the controversies	252
8.3. The educators	257
8.4. Educators’ attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy.....	263
8.5. The current grouping practice and decision-making concerns	268
8.6. Educators’ perceptions of the senior high school entry system and	

policy practice	277
8.7. Educators' perceptions of pupils' ability, teaching and the practice of the policy	281
8.7.1. The perceptions of pupils' ability and policy practice	281
8.7.2. The perceptions of teaching in mixed-ability groups and policy practice	285
8.8. Summary	287
Chapter 9 : Conclusion and Discussion	290
9.1. The Policy process: a cyclical process with the influence of the wider contexts	293
9.1.1. The cyclical and contested policy process	293
9.1.2. The influence of political eras and the education state	295
9.2. The governance of the mixed-ability grouping policy	297
9.3. School practice: parents' demands and the market-like mechanism, the competing perspectives, and the embedded perceptions of teaching and learning	300
9.3.1. Parents' demands and the 'market-like mechanism'	301
9.3.2. Educators' attitudes and educators' perceptions of pupils' ability and teaching	303
9.3.3. The influence of the senior high school entry system.....	308
9.4. Notes about educational change and policy implication.....	310
9.5. The limitation of the research and future directions	314
Appendix 1: Taiwanese School System.....	320
Appendix 2: The Versions of the Mixed-ability Policy	322
Appendix 3: The Ministry of Education Enhancing the Implementation of the Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy Implementation Plan.....	326
Appendix 4: Principal Questionnaire—.....	329
Attitudes towards the Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy and Issues Raised.....	329
Appendix 5: Research Consent Form	339
Appendix 6: Interview Questions	340
Bibliography	343

Figure Index

Figure 1: The conceptualisation of policy cycle	47
Figure 2: The analytical framework	52
Figure 3: Research subjects and their relationships	64
Figure 4 :Taiwanese School System	321

Table Index

Table 1 : Research design overview	61
Table 2: The overview of the research of the evolution of the policy.....	65
Table 3: Sources of document for exploring the evolution of the policy...	68
Table 4: The control over the education system before the abolition of Martial Law	98
Table 5: The characteristics of the <i>political era</i> in the autocratic regime	102
Table 6: The characteristics of the <i>education state</i> in the autocratic regime	102
Table 7: The four versions of the mixed-ability grouping policy during the Martial Law period (1979~1987).....	103
Table 8: The characteristics of the <i>political era</i> after 1987.....	123
Table 9: The characteristics of the <i>education state</i> after 1987	123
Table 10: Power structure within the education system before and after 1987	124
Table 11: The four versions of the mixed-ability grouping policy in the post-Martial Law period (1987~).....	125
Table 12: The principals' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy	196
Table 13: Principals' understanding of teachers' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy	198
Table 14: Principals' understanding of parents' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy	200
Table 15: Have the principals ever heard teachers proposed the following practices?	202
Table 16: Have the principals ever heard parents proposed the following practices?	203
Table 17: Principals' understanding of teachers' opinions about teaching in mixed-ability groups	205
Table 18: The grouping practice adopted in the schools.....	207

Table 19: Do other schools use streaming?	208
Table 20: Why do schools establish gifted class?	209
Table 21: The barriers to the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy (Question asked: How would you rate the importance of these aspects that may hinder the practice of the policy? Please rank in order of importance (i.e. 1, 2, 3 etc.).....	210
Table 22: How can the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy be improved?	212
Table 23: The influence of the senior high school entry system.....	214
Table 24: The educators interviewed at Pinewood Junior High.....	223
Table 25: The educators interviewed at North Creek Junior High.....	258

Preface

My interest in the mixed-ability grouping policy has been developing since I was a junior high school pupil. Although I was lucky enough to attend a so-called ‘normal’ junior high school, I heard many stories from my friends who attended other schools that they had to run back to their ‘originally assigned mixed-ability grouped classes’ from the streamed classes that they had been really placed in when the inspectors from the central or local educational authorities visited their schools. Also, as Taiwanese pupils, we were all familiar with the term ‘cow raising class’, which is a term used commonly by Taiwanese people to describe the lower attaining classes in junior high schools. This term implies that the pupils in the lower attaining classes have no motivation and no ability to learn, so the schools usually just let them ‘wander’ around all day without trying to teach them. Nonetheless, as unreasonable as the existence of the ‘cow-raising class’ is, attainment-based differentiation has been a usual practice in junior high schools in Taiwan. It was after I started working in the Humanistic Education Foundation (the largest civil educational reform group in Taiwan) in 2001, that I finally came to understand that the mixed-ability grouping policy had been issued a long time ago and had been promoted by the Ministry of Education for many years. It was just that very few schools followed the policy, and the majority of pupils were not aware that they did not have to be differentiated based on their academic performance or judged solely based on their test scores.

As a policy analyst and reporter between 2001 and 2006 in the Humanistic Education Foundation, which is a civil group that has participated actively in the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy, I had several opportunities to interview pupils, parents, and some teachers who complained about the streaming adopted in their schools. I also had the chance to probe the responses from the schools and the local educational authorities with

regard to the lodged complaints. It was during this process that things became clear to me as I realised that the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy is entangled within the competition of different interests and different concerns. For example, whilst I obtained lots of information regarding the unequal and sometimes discriminatory education provided in streamed system, for example that pupils in lower attaining classes were often provided with inferior facilities, arranged to sit in the back rows in school talent shows, and that some teachers publicly told lower attaining pupils that teaching them was a waste of time, the responses of the schools and the local educational authorities were sometimes baffling, and some schools kept arguing that there was a need to use streaming even though they were aware of the problem it created.

My own reflection on the education I had in Taiwanese schools and my work experience at the Humanistic Education Foundation are the two reasons I decided to conduct this research. First of all, being educated in an environment that emphasises test scores more than what pupils learn, and finding that there are many pupils who are explicitly or implicitly discriminated against and looked down on in schools only because of their academic performance, I have wondered how and why this ‘test scores first’ ideology could have dominated Taiwanese education for such a long time. Further, although I am aware that there are ideological and practical concerns in the dispute of grouping practice, I find it disturbing that under the circumstance that many pupils have suffered in the attainment-based differentiated system (not only the lower attaining pupils, but also the higher attaining ones who are often overloaded with tests), the mixed-ability grouping policy and other policies that were designed to help pupils to get rid of this situation have only been discussed in a limited scope without being contemplated upon further. I thus decided to explore the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan in my PhD study with these doubts and questions in mind.

Although I myself already have a standpoint that the attainment-based differentiation system undermines both the quality and the equality of education, my work experience helped me to be aware that different policy actors have complicated interpretations of the equality and the quality of education, and that different policy actors perceive the within school attainment-based differentiation system from different viewpoints. I thus realise that for me, as someone who is eager to decrease the inequality of education in junior high schools, it is imperative to observe the actual process and the concerns of different policy actors within the mixed-ability grouping policy so that I may come out with in-depth explanations with regard to the current disputes, and that I may discover the common ground of different interests that had existed before or that has the possibility to be formed in the future in order to truly facilitate a positive change in education. The journey of exploring the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan is now presented in this thesis.

Definition of terms used in this research

Streaming (tracking)

The method of assigning pupils to classes based on their overall attainments. The streamed classes are used as the teaching units for all subjects. The result is that the overall attainments of all pupils in different classes can be clearly ranked.

Setting (ability grouping)

The grouping of pupils according to their attainments in the subjects concerned. This is usually carried out across the whole year group so that two or more classes can be timetabled for the same subject at the same time.

Mixed-ability grouping

No attempt is made to group pupils by ability. Instead year grouping may be done randomly or a deliberate mix may be achieved on the basis of factors such as social background, gender, or previous attainments.

Policy

A course of actions and a web of decisions and texts that aim to achieve specific goals. The actions and decisions of a policy may evolve over time and may be transformed by different policy actors (adopted from Bowe, Ball, & Gold, 1992; Hill, 1997).

Policy actors

Officers at the Ministry of Education, officers at local educational authorities, school principals, school teachers, parents and interest groups.

Chapter 1 : Introduction

This study is concerned with the contested process of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan. In the 30-year development of the mixed-ability grouping policy, the debates about the ideologies regarding mixed-ability grouping and attainment-based differentiation have persisted, and the implementation of the policy has been stumbling. A case that aroused national attention was the documentary produced by the Public Television Service in Taiwan—‘The Magic Mirror’. By unmasking the adoption of streaming along with the unequal treatment provided to pupils in streamed classes, this documentary recurred to the matter of the implementation predicament and the ideological debates of the mixed-ability grouping policy (Y-H. Hsu, 2005).

Before the issue of the mixed-ability grouping policy, streaming was promoted by the central educational authority in Taiwan. The ‘ladder-like’ attainment-based differentiation in junior high schools was prominent. Pupils were grouped into a highly hierarchical system in A+, A, A-, B+.....and maybe even C- classes, based solely on their overall academic performance. Terms such as ‘senior high school entry class’ and ‘cow-raising class’¹ were commonly used by school educators and the public to describe the A+ class and the lowest class, which were argued by early researchers as having negative influences on the self-esteem and the attainments of the pupils who are placed in lower attaining classes (Y-H.Lin, 1980; H-C. Hsu, 1977; L-Y. Shang, 1980; K-S. Yang, 1976). Further, the expected positive influences on pupils in higher attaining classes, such as the boosted academic performance, were found to be controversial (H-H. Chang, 1975; L-Y. Shang, 1980).

In the Taiwanese school system², which is composed of kindergarten, primary schools

¹ ‘Cow-raising class’ (Fun-Nu Ban 放牛班) is a term used by Taiwanese people to describe the lower ability class. The term implies that the lower ability pupils are like cows as they have little motivation to progress and thus they do not need much attention from their keeper. It also implies that the teacher of that class will not provide pupils with a solid education.

² Please see Appendix for the key facts about the Taiwanese school system.

(1st to 6th grades), junior high schools (7th to 9th grades, or 1st to 3rd grades in junior high), senior high schools and higher education, the junior high school level is a crucial transition point. After the junior high school level education, which is the last stage of compulsory education, pupils have to take the senior high school entry examination to be placed in different senior high schools. Whilst the senior high schools are divided into academic/vocational streams, and the placement of pupils in different schools is based mainly on pupils examination scores, pupils' attainments have always been valued in junior high schools and have been used as the criterion to differentiate pupils in junior high schools.

In the 1970s, Taiwanese policy analysts began to discuss the disadvantages of using streaming at the level of compulsory education, and the issues of equity and quality of junior high level education were of concern. Scholars who participated in the debates strongly contended that the unequal education resulting from the streaming adopted in schools not only harmed the majority of pupils academically and emotionally, but also resulted in most of the teenager problems in society (Y-P. Chuang, 2006; "Streaming," 1976, p. 2). This argument and the successive relevant reports in Taiwanese newspapers invoked the first wave of discussions within the education system about the grouping practices in junior high schools. The mixed-ability grouping policy was thus issued in 1979 as a pilot educational regulation. It then became an official policy in 1982, and was enforced through law in 2004. During the long process of the policy, the contents of the policy were revised several times, and the use of streaming and banding was completely banned after 1985.

Studies show that in the UK and in the US the grouping practice in schools has also been an important issue in the policy arena. In the UK, it is indicated that education in England went through an ideological change after the 1940s. In the course of this change the comprehensive ideology and the adoption of mixed-ability grouping gradually gained

attention (Ball, 1981; Kelly, 1975, as cited in Harlen & Malcolm, 1997). Ball (1981) suggested that although the comprehensive ideology developed in England was initially vague, it could be interpreted from different perspectives (meritocracy, social engineering and egalitarian), and the 'egalitarian' pursuit resulted in the adoption of mixed-ability grouping in schools. Some of the local educational authorities also published official papers which suggested that schools should consider mixed-ability grouping (Reid et al., 1981).

According to Ireson and Hallam (2001), mixed-ability grouping was the most common grouping practice in primary schools and in the first year of secondary schools in the early 1990s, although the new pressure caused by the National Curriculum and market forces in England later increased the adoption of setting, with the belief that setting could raise pupil attainments (Araújo, 2007; Ireson & Hallam, 2001; Reay, 1998). This trend was also observed in Scotland, where the use of setting in upper primary schools has increased (Hamilton & O'Hara, 2005), and scholars found that the complex and sometimes contradictory opinions with regard to the academic effects and other influences of grouping practices on pupils pointed out by the policy, the inspections and the research studies together 'put schools in a difficult position' (Smith & Sutherland, 2003, p144).

In the US, the promotion of de-tracking was accompanied by a strong ideology that is against the hidden yet institutionalised class and race discrimination within schools. In the 80s and 90s, studies with regard to the unequal treatments that pupils received from schools' adoption of streaming, and the disproportionate academic achievement gap between pupils with different races and social backgrounds pervaded the policy discourse. Some of the state departments of education thus issued policy documents discouraging the use of streaming in middle schools (Hallinan, 2000; Loveless, 1999).

It can be seen that mixed-ability grouping was endowed with different aspects of expectations. For example, expectations such as to achieve the comprehensive ideology, to

eliminate negative psychological influences on pupils, and to eliminate inequality within schools have been often mentioned in the policy arena to promote the use of mixed-ability grouping. Nonetheless, studies show that the implementation of mixed-ability grouping in England and the US encountered severe challenges, both in its ideology and practicality, just as in Taiwan.

The implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan was known to be stumbling for many years. Although in earlier years most of the understandings about the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy were anecdotal due to the lack of official evaluations published, more data that had been extracted from surveys appeared after 1996 revealing the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy in junior high schools. These surveys found that it was not uncommon for junior high schools to use streaming or use different kinds of ‘disguised forms’ to group pupils although the schools were prohibited to do so by the mixed-ability grouping policy (Feng, 1996; Humanistic Education Foundation[HEF], 2002, 2003a, 2008, 2009)³.

Further, after the mixed-ability grouping policy has been enforced through law in 2004, the so-called ‘disguised forms of streaming’ increased and became the targets for criticism. The adjective ‘disguised’ was adopted by the Humanistic Education Foundation [HEF] in 2002 and then was used by teachers’ groups and parents’ groups to describe the phenomenon of schools using streaming while declaring they were following the policy. After 2004, the burgeoning gifted classes (for academic subjects), talented classes (for art, music and PE) and the extra classes established at weekends and vacations to group higher

³ In these four surveys HEF randomly select 1/3 of junior high schools in Taiwan to interview the pupils in different grades. The main question asked in the HEF survey was: Does your school use streaming to group pupils into different classes, such as A and B classes, higher and lower classes and senior high school entry and general classes? In 2002, 53.8% of the surveyed junior high schools were found have violated the policy; in 2003, the proportion was 67.9%; and the figure in 2008 was 50.1% and in 2009 was 60%(HEF, 2002, 2003a, 2008, 2009).

attaining pupils became the targeted ‘disguised form of streaming’ that were criticised.

In 2006, the National Teachers’ Association [NTA] held a news conference criticising the sudden increase of gifted classes in junior high schools (National Teachers’ Association, 2006). NTA stated that in many teachers’ experience, not only did these special classes operate without qualified teachers and equipment, but the establishment of the gifted and the talented classes was just a strategy that was being used by schools to secure attainment-based within school streaming. In addition, the HEF released one survey at around the same time using the findings that some pupils in talented classes, such as the ‘Tennis Class’ or the ‘Music Class’, did not even know how to play tennis or any instruments to question whether schools were using these talented class to create attainment-based streaming (T-L. Chien, 2005; Y-H. Hsu, 2005). The investigation of the Ministry of Education [MOE] also found that many gifted classes were in fact the higher attaining classes where pupils were crammed with tests and expectations to enter the highest-ranking academic senior high school (T-L. Chien, 2005; Y-H. Hsu, 2005).

In brief, although the mixed-ability grouping policy has been promoted for many years, the implementation of the policy has also been in serious doubt for years. The implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy thus becomes an important issue in the research of educational policy in Taiwan.

The majority of the existing research studies in Taiwan approached this policy implementation issue in a ‘problem-identifying’ manner. In his paper: *The barriers that hinder the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy and the coping strategies: a policy implementation perspective* (Yen, 1998), Yen categorised the ten identified barriers of the mixed-ability grouping policy into two categories—the policy content and the policy context—to describe the characteristics of the barriers and to propose corresponding solutions. For the policy content category, Yen indicated that the mixed-ability grouping

policy itself was initiated without an applicable implementation plan and adequate fiscal resource. He also suggested that the degree of change was too high and said the practitioners were still suspicious about the ‘side-effects’, such as the lowering of teaching quality and pupils’ attainments in mixed-ability groups. For the policy context category, Yen indicated that the rigid administration in the educational system which resulted in inefficient policy promotion and inspection was one crucial factor that hindered the implementation. He also pointed out that both schools and teachers were haunted by the pressure of the senior high school entry examination, and this pressure led to the schools’ adoption of streaming in the hope of sending more pupils into better ranking senior high schools. This synthesis by Yen was echoed by other recent analyses. Several researchers also identified that the flaws of educational administration, the lack of public consensus, and the influence of the senior high school entry system to be the important barriers that hinder the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy (C-J. Lin, 2007; H-M. Lin, 2004; Ma, 2005).

However, in spite of the breadth of the existing studies in Taiwan, their ‘problem-identifying’ assumption limited these studies’ understandings of the ‘barriers’ identified, and weakened their ability to propose robust explanations for the evolving dilemma of the mixed-ability grouping policy implementation. Scholars have suggested that this problem-solving style of policy analysis, which usually starts from a technical-rational perspective that assumes a linear and consequential policy process, undermines the ability for research to capture the dynamic, fluid, and multi-dimensional social relationships between the policy and the policy actors and between the policy actors in different positions (Ball, 1981; Datnow, 2006; Malen & Knapp, 1997). The implementation study of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan mostly fell into this category. In describing the practice of the policy, most of them assumed that the relationships between policy actors were fixed, and that the identified barriers were extrinsic to them. For example, when

describing the influence of the senior high school entry system, the relationship between the system and school educators was viewed as unidirectional without dialogue or struggle. It was the same for other 'barriers' that were identified and how these 'barriers' existed and functioned within the complicated relationships between policy actors and between structure and agency was left unexplored. This 'problem-solving' assumption also ignores the micro-politics, namely the bargaining, contested, and situated relationships between policy actors within or between organisations (Ball, 1987; Blase, 2005; Malen & Knapp, 1997; Mosen-Low et al., 2009). For example, whilst many studies discussed school practitioners' attitudes, the group-level and the cross-group analysis (Ball, 1981; Blase, 2005), which emphasises the dynamic within a particular system or between different systems, was missing.

Moreover, although previous studies discussed the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy within different timeframes, few studies took the evolution of the policy, and the changing socio-political and the wider educational contexts into consideration. As indicated by Ball (2006), a policy study that lacks the 'sense of time' not only underestimates the deep-rooted socio-political and cultural influence, but also overlooks 'the process of reform and change' (p.18). In McLaughlin's argument, the stability and the extent of the change can only be detected through looking at the long-term development of a policy (McLaughlin, 2008).

Therefore, in order to explore the aspects of the mixed-ability grouping policy that has been ignored in existing works and to extend the understanding of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan, this study utilises an analytical framework that applies a contextualised and long-term perspective to explore the ideological debates, the conflicts between the interests of different policy actors, and the contexts that shape the above conflicts over the policy. This analytical framework will be discussed in chapter 2.

Further, four issues that were previously argued as influencing the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy are specifically examined using this alternative perspective. The interpretation of pupils' ability and the perceptions of teaching in different forms of groups, which were argued as crucial in affecting policy actors' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy are two of them (Lunn, 1970; Reid, et al.,1981). The influence of the senior high school entry examination on policy practice, and the governance of the mixed-ability grouping policy are the other two focused issues. By looking at the policy process in a dynamic manner, this study attempts to gain an enhanced understanding of the evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy and the interrelationships between the contexts and the policy, the policy and the policy actors, and between different policy actors.

The research design of this study utilises several research techniques to investigate the contexts and the evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy. It attempts to capture the sense of time, the influence of the wider contexts, and the interplay between the crucial policy actors through the design. To trace the policy over time and to understand the influence of the wider political, economic and educational contexts, a documentary analysis was adopted to explore the documents relevant to the wider contexts and different kinds of policy texts. To understand the evolution of the policy, a documentary analysis, a questionnaire survey, in-depth interviews and case studies were conducted to explore the attitudes and actions of policy actors in different positions, the relationships between policy actors, and the contested key issues in the mixed-ability grouping policy.

1.1. Outline of the Chapters

The outline of the chapters in this thesis is introduced below.

To build the empirical and theoretical foundations for this study, two aspects of literature review are demonstrated in *Chapter 2*. First, the review of existing research studies

about the equity and quality issues of school grouping practice and the mixed-ability grouping policy implementation in Taiwan, the UK and the US is conducted to extract the research questions for this study. Starting with the intuitive inquiry: ‘Why has not the mixed-ability grouping policy been implemented as expected?’, five sub-questions were proposed as follows:

1. How have the power relationships between policy actors influenced the practice of the policy?
2. How has the mixed-ability grouping policy evolved till today?
3. How have the policy actors’ perceptions of pupils’ ability and the interpretation of pupils’ ability in policy texts influenced the practice of the policy?
4. How have the policy actors’ perceptions of teaching in mixed-ability groups and the interpretation of teaching in mixed-ability groups in policy texts influenced the practice of the policy?
5. How has the senior high school entry examination influenced the practice of the policy?

The second aspect of review is the perspectives developed to understand the policy process and the implementation of an educational policy. Further, the analytical framework adopted in the research is discussed and identified in the latter part of this chapter.

In *Chapter 3*, the research design of this study, including the rationales of the design, the scope of the study, the research techniques adopted, the research subjects selected, and the process of conducting the research and analysing the data are introduced. In the last part of the chapter, the issues of validity in qualitative research and the reflexivity of the researcher are presented. As mentioned above, this study utilises various strategies to approach the wider contexts and the evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy. These strategies not only help extract different kind of information from different sources to facilitates this study to gain extensive understandings of the policy practice, the data

obtained from these strategies can also be used to triangulate data for the purpose of validating data analysis.

Chapter 4 to *Chapter 8* present the findings and the analysis of this study. Beginning with the investigation of the evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy from its inception to today, *Chapter 4* traces the transformation of the socio-political environments and the changing power structure within the educational system during the long policy process. The concepts of pupils' ability and teaching, and the influence of the governance and the senior high school entry system are explored within the wider contexts in order to capture the changing interpretations of these relevant issues and their influences on the policy practice.

Chapter 5 examines the current governance of the mixed-ability grouping policy in both the central and the local educational authorities in detail. The interplay between different levels of educational authorities and schools is explored and discussed. After the exploration in the previous chapter about the changing power relationships between policy actors, the main objective of this chapter is to capture the situated considerations and the political struggles of the governing bodies. By focusing on the conflicts faced and the actions taken by the MOE and the two studied local educational authorities, the findings not only manifest the political aspect of governance, but also reveal how governing bodies strive for balance between ideological and practical concerns.

The following three chapters concern the practice of junior high schools and the attitudes and the concerns of school educators. In *Chapter 6* the results of the questionnaire survey of the junior high principals in two local educational authorities—Sunrise County and Middle Line County (pseudonyms) are presented. This survey was conducted for the purpose of gaining an overview about the attitudes and the practices of junior high schools in the two studied local educational authorities and understanding the local contexts of the

two case studied schools. Principals' own attitudes, their understanding about teachers' and parents' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy, the barriers perceived by educators, and the schools' practice of the policy were surveyed in the questionnaire.

Chapter 7 and *Chapter 8* respectively present the case studies of the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy in two junior high schools—Pinewood Junior High in Sunrise County and North Creek Junior High in Middle Line County. Through the discussion of the governance in the two local educational authorities in the last chapter, and the introduction of the disputes about the mixed-ability grouping policy in the two local educational authorities, the two schools are firstly contextualised within their local situations. Then, through the case studies of the two schools, which utilise interviews with school educators and a documentary analysis of the school level policy texts, the practitioners' attitudes, their practical concerns, and the process the schools had been through to make decision about grouping practice under conflicting interests are revealed. The micro-politics within the schools and the weighing between the contested perspectives within individual educators and within individual schools are the research focuses in these two chapters.

The last chapter—*Chapter 9* includes the conclusion and the discussion of the findings. The connections between the socio-political/wider educational contexts and the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy are synthesised. How the senior high school entry system and the perceptions of pupils' ability and teaching have evolved and influenced the practice of policy is discussed. Finally, I discuss the momentum of educational change observed in this research from the analysis of the long process of the mixed-ability grouping policy and the corresponding policy implications. The strengths and the weaknesses of this study, and the suggestions for future research are presented in the end of this chapter.

Chapter 2 : Literature review and analytical framework

This chapter contains two main sections which review the following two aspects of literature: the studies about grouping practice in education and the research approaches developed for analysing educational policies. The first section introduces the research on the effects of different grouping practices, the implementation studies with regard to the adoption of mixed-ability grouping, and the key issues concerning the mixed-ability grouping policy. The second section discusses the research scope and the research framework developed for analyzing educational policies from both the implementation study tradition and the sociological perspectives. At the end of the chapter, the research questions and the analytical framework adopted by this study to examine the policy process of the mixed-ability grouping in Taiwan are proposed.

2.1. Mixed-ability grouping in education

In this section, researches regarding the influence of the grouping practice adopted in schools, most of them about the influence of streaming, and the studies concerning the implementation of mixed-ability grouping in schools, will be reviewed. The former helps this research to grasp the core arguments of the grouping practice issue and to form a basis for investigating the contentious issues within the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan. The latter discusses the research approaches and the findings of the mixed-ability grouping related implementation studies for the purpose of identifying the research angles that are needed in Taiwanese contexts. As mentioned in chapter 1, the adoption of mixed-ability grouping in education has also been an important issue in the policy arena in the UK and the US. There were also abundant research studies concerning the influences of different grouping practices and the implementation of mixed-ability grouping in schools in these two countries. The following review thus draws literature from Taiwan, the UK, the US and also

other countries to identify the research gap that can be filled and to discern the unique phenomenon in Taiwan that is worth exploring.

2.1.1. The main issues of grouping practice: effects and inequality

It is found that the existing research studies with regard to the grouping practices adopted in schools extensively discussed the following two issues: the effects of different kinds of grouping practices, especially streaming, on pupils' learning and personal development, and in which ways these effects contribute to the equality or inequality of education. In the following sections I will discuss these issues respectively.

2.1.1.1 Pupils' attainments in different kinds of grouping practice

Differentiation within schools, such as streaming and setting is usually argued by many educators as being effective for teaching and learning (Feng, 1996; Hamilton & O'Hara, 2005; Ireson & Hallam, 2001; Ireon, Hallam, & Hurley, 2005; S-F. Liu, 2004; Reid et al., 1981). The argument is intuitively persuasive as it is easier to teach pupils with similar abilities in one classroom where the learning pace will be suitable for them, thus enabling them to learn better. Further, the notion of preventing the more academically able pupils from being 'held back' by the less academically able pupils is also an important argument which is held by the proponents of within-school differentiation (Argys et al., 1996; Gamoran, 1992; Hanushek & Wößmann, 2005; Ireson & Hallam, 2001). Streaming and setting are thus viewed by its proponents as a desirable way to raise pupils' attainment level.

Nevertheless, the research findings about the effects of grouping practice on pupils' attainments are controversial. For example, some studies find that different grouping practices do not influence differently pupils' attainments. In his synthesized review, Slavin (1990) reviewed selected research studies based on his solid criteria and suggested that there

is no significant difference of attainments between pupils in streamed classes, set classes and mixed-ability classes. Similar conclusions are also suggested by other researchers from either their review of existing studies or empirical research (Betts & Shkolnik, 2000; H-H. Chang, 1975; Gregory, 1984; Slavin, 1987; Slavin, 1990; Harlen & Malcolm, 1997; Ireson et al., 2002).

Some other studies found that streaming and setting slightly benefit pupils in higher attaining groups but not those in lower attaining groups. Kerckhoff (1986) indicated that pupils in higher attaining groups gained more but pupils in lower attaining groups learnt less over a five-year period based on his analysis of a large British national sample of pupils' placements and test scores. Ireson and Hallam (2001) also argued that the differentiation system tends to benefit high-achieving groups at the expense of low-achieving pupil's benefit while the mixed-ability system tends to benefit low-achieving groups. The research studies conducted in Taiwan also had similar findings (Y-C. Chen, 2005; Kan, 2006). Y-C. Chen (2005) compared the attainments of pupils in three kinds of groups: mixed-ability groups, streamed groups, and set groups. Although she found there was no significant difference in average attainment levels in the three kinds of groups, she noticed that higher attaining pupils performed better in streamed groups, and lower attaining pupils performed better in mixed-ability groups.

In addition, some studies indicated that mixed-ability groups facilitate the learning of lower attaining pupils (Ireson & Hallam, 2001; Venkatakrishnan & William, 2003). Venkatakrishnan and William (2003) compared the math attainments of pupils who were placed in different kinds of groups in an English 11-16 comprehensive school. They found that both the higher and lower attaining pupils did not benefit from being placed at streamed classes, but the lower attaining pupils had made significant improvements in mixed-ability groups.

Overall, existing research studies show that the effects of streaming to increase pupils' attainments are not as straightforward as was declared by the proponents of within-school attainment-based differentiation. Not only may higher attaining pupils not benefit from being placed in homogeneous groups, the consensual finding is that pupils who are placed in lower attaining groups would not benefit from a streamed system. Nonetheless, the argument that streaming leads to better pupil attainment is still powerful in the policy-making arena and this is constantly reiterated within different policy discourses.

2.1.1.2 The social and emotional influence of a streamed system

The effects of grouping practice on pupils' self-images, teachers' expectations of pupils, and pupils' future educational and life expectations have also been a matter of concern. Scholars argued that the streamed system conveys a message to pupils with regard to who does and does not have learning potential or recognised 'ability' through the structure (grouping practice) and the reinforcement of teachers' attitudes and behaviours. These kinds of messages usually resulted in a negative impact on pupils in lower attaining classes because these pupils felt discouraged in terms of their self-esteem, self academic-concept and their motivation to learn (Alexander et al., 1978; Y-C. Chen, 2005; Gregory, 1984; Hallinan, 1994; Hamilton, 2002; Hamilton, 2006; Kelly, 1975, as cited in Harlen & Malcolm, 1997; HEF, 2003; Ireson & Hallam, 2001; Oakes, 1985; C-Y. Shin, 2005; Rosenholtz & Rosenholtz, 1981; Rosenholtz & Wilson, 1980). Further, even for pupils in higher-attaining classes, scholars found that some of them suffered from the high expectations, fast-paced lessons and pressure put on them to succeed and compete in these classes (Boaler, 1997a; Boaler, 1997b; Boaler et al., 2000).

Streaming also influences the interaction patterns between pupils and pupils' attitude towards school. The differentiation-polarisation theory proposed and tested by Hargreaves

(1967), Lacey (1970), Ball (1981), Abraham (1989) and Van Houtte (2006) suggests that streaming dichotomises pupils' attitudes towards school. It has been found that due to the different school experiences, pupils in lower attaining class usually have a more negative attitude towards school than pupils in higher attaining classes. Scholars contend that whilst pupils in lower attaining classes feel they are denied and neglected in the existing system, they create an alternative subculture to rebel against the mainstream culture (Hargreaves, 1967; Rosenbaum, 1976). Schwartz (1981) further argued that the disruptive actions of pupils often observed in lower attaining groups are not a result of pupils' dispositions. Rather, these actions are used by lower attaining pupils to demonstrate their 'existence' in school, which can be seen as a negative outcome of within-school differentiation. In addition, whilst the differentiation-polarization theory focuses on the different attitudes towards schools of pupils in different classes, Ireson and Hallam (2001) found that for all pupils, the more structured the grouping practice the schools adopt, the less positive feelings that pupils have towards school.

This strand of study touches an important issue with regard to the socialisation of pupils in school. Whilst findings show that pupils tend to gain different self-perceptions based on the hierarchical attainment-based groups they are placed in, it is important to note that pupils also develop their own attitudes towards the 'culture' in school while the culture, which is delivered or shaped by the grouping practice seems to value pupils with certain characteristics and devalue others at the same time.

2.1.1.3 The inequality in a streamed system

The inequality produced or reinforced by the streamed and the set system in schools has been argued by scholars from different aspects. A general observation is that the inequality, especially the inequality of attainments is initially triggered by the structure and

then reinforced by teachers. Further, the combination of the disproportionate placements of disadvantaged pupils in lower attaining classes and the inferior quality of education provided to lower attaining classes leads to the questions being raised about the effects of the streamed system on reinforcing social inequality.

First of all, while facilitating teaching and learning is one important argument to support the use of streaming and setting, it is argued that there is an inequality of pupils' attainments between pupils who are placed in different streams. From a longitudinal research study that traced pupils who were placed in different streams in junior high schools in Taiwan, C-H. Hsieh (as cited in Y-P. Yang, 2004) concluded that the gap between pupils' attainments was widened after the three year streaming period in junior high schools. She believed this indicated that the pupils in lower attaining classes were not provided with adequate teaching resources. A similar finding was reported by Hanushek and Wößmann (2005) in their internationally comparative study. They compared the pupils' attainments in 18 countries and found that the countries that had a streamed system that streams pupils in their early ages had an increased inequality in pupils' attainments between primary and secondary school level.

Moreover, researchers found that teachers' attitudes towards pupils and the methods teachers adopted in teaching different streams or sets hindered equal learning opportunities. Some studies revealed that pupils in lower attaining classes were provided with a less stimulating curriculum and teachers had lower expectations of them which obstructed the opportunities for them to move into higher attaining classes and to gain access to better resources (Boaler et al., 2000; Oakes, 1985; Hallinan, 1994; Schwartz, 1981). Studies also show that some schools tended to assign experienced and qualified teachers to the higher attaining classes and the less experienced teachers to the lower attaining classes, which resulted in an inequality in the quality of instruction (Boaler et al., 2000; Y-H. Hsu, 2005;

Y-H. Hsu, 2006; Ireson & Hallam; 2001; Sukhnandan & Lee, 1998), and the attainment inequality between pupils in different classes (Gamoran, 1992; Y-H. Hsu, 2005; Y-H. Hsu, 2006).

Further, it has been found in some countries that attainment-based differentiation within schools is associated with pupils' race or the socio-economic status of pupils' family (Ball, 1981; P-L. Chen, 1994; Oakes, 1985; Straková, 2007). It should be firstly borne in mind that different countries have their own social characteristics thus the findings with regard to the social inequality reinforced by education should be perceived within their own contexts. In the US, Oakes indicated that the poorer and the minority pupils were found to be disproportionately placed in lower attaining groups. In the UK, Hargreaves (1967), Lacey (1970), and Ball (1981) suggested that the under achievements of working-class pupils could be attributed to streaming which disproportionately placed working class pupils into lower attaining streams. In Taiwan, H-C. Hsieh (as cited in Y-P. Yang, 2004) found there was a direct impact of parents' educational status on their children' streaming allocation; and P-L. Chen (1994) found that the SES backgrounds of pupils were significantly different between different streams as pupils with a higher SES background tended to be placed in higher attaining classes. Further, in an recent comparative study that investigated the relationship between pupils' attainments and their family background in the Czech Republic, Canada, Sweden and Finland, Straková found that the early tracking adopted in the Czech Republic strengthened the relationship between pupils attainments and their families' social-economic backgrounds and pupils from a higher social-economic background family benefited the most with regard to their general performance in the streamed system (Straková, 2007).

To conclude the effects of different grouping practices on pupils, scholars found that pupils' attainments were not significantly influenced by different kinds of grouping methods,

but discovered that pupil's social and emotional development may be negatively affected by being placed in lower attaining classes, and that the inequality of attainments between pupils who were placed at different streams was increased.

2.1.2. Implementation research on the adoption of mixed-ability grouping and different research perspectives

This part reviews selected studies about the implementation of mixed-ability grouping in England, the US and Taiwan for the purpose of identifying the key issues that are concerned in the implementation of mixed-ability grouping, and the perspectives adopted by these studies to analyse and to understand policy implementation.

2.1.2.1 Implementation research in England and the US

The mixed-ability grouping policy related studies in England and the US can be divided into two strands. Although both of them aim to understand the process of change, one strand focuses on identifying the obstacles and possibilities of the policy implementation, and the other focuses on discovering the dynamic and contested interactions between policy actors within the process of change.

The first strand of research often utilises questionnaire surveys and interviews to discover educators' attitudes and their practical concerns towards different grouping practices, and to identify the factors that influence the implementation of mixed-ability grouping.

The study conducted by Reid et al. in England is one example (Reid et al., 1981). In the study, Reid and her colleague surveyed and interviewed educators in primary and secondary schools in England about schools' grouping practice decision. They suggested that the objectives of schools, the styles of school management and the organisational strategies

adopted by schools were influential in grouping practice decisions in the studied schools.

For example, the schools that believed that pupils should have a fresh start during the transition from primary school to secondary school were found to be more likely to use mixed-ability grouping. How schools introduced mixed-ability grouping in schools was also found to have an impact on how teachers accepted it. Reid et al. thus argued that mixed-ability grouping and mixed-ability teaching were more likely to be successfully implemented with adequate implementation timetable and teaching resources.

In addition, this research correlated teachers' attitudes with their backgrounds to examine whether their experience of mixed-ability teaching has had an effect on their attitudes. Reid et al. found that the training previously received by teachers, the degree of involvement in mixed-ability grouping teaching, and the length of time teachers had been teaching were highly correlated with teachers' attitudes towards mixed-ability grouping. The more the teachers were involved in mixed-ability teaching, the more positive their attitude towards mixed-ability grouping was. Further, although the nature of the subjects taught was found to be an important influence on teachers' preference of grouping practices, for example, in general teachers who teach math or literacy favoured streaming or setting, it was found in this study that teachers who taught the same subjects could have different approaches to teach the subjects and preferred different kinds of grouping practice.

A similar research study was conducted in the US by Loveless (Loveless, 1999). In the two states in the US that encouraged 'de-tracking' (de-streaming) middle schools, Loveless surveyed and case studied several middle schools to find out how they implemented the state-wide policy. Four factors were identified as crucial in influencing the adoption of mixed-ability grouping: a school's institutional characteristics, a school's organisational characteristics, the technical challenges posed by the reform, and the political influences on the policy.

In relation to a school's institutional characteristics and a school's organizational characteristics, Loveless reported that the composition of the pupil body and the social status of the neighbourhood influenced the decision of grouping practices in schools. For example, he found that urban schools that educate less well-off and low-achieving pupils were more likely to 'de-track' schools than suburban, high-achieving schools. Loveless also identified that the technical challenges, namely the teaching in mixed-ability groups faced by the studied schools are crucial factors that affected schools' implementation of mixed-ability grouping. Although Loveless found that changes did occur in de-tracked classrooms, for example, an increased use of oral reading, more hands-on materials, slower paced teaching and the use of fewer textbooks, he argued that the changes in teaching were pragmatic rather than ideological, and he found that the problem of how to teach in heterogeneous classes still appeared to be teachers' primary concern when considering the preferred grouping practice. Loveless also found that teachers who had preferences for different teaching methods had different attitudes towards the use of mixed-ability grouping. Most of the teachers in favour of progressive pedagogy were found to be more likely to support 'de-tracking'(de-streaming), and the teachers in favour of traditional approaches were found to be more likely to oppose 'de-tracking'(de-streaming).

The above two research studies fell into the category of policy studies that hold a techno-rational assumption to investigate policy implementation (Ball, 1987; Datnow, 2006; Malen & Knapp, 1997). This strand of policy study is often described as rational, technical, or linear oriented (Bacchi, 2000; Ball 1987; Ball, 2006; Datnow, 2006; Hill, 1997; Malen & Knapp, 1997; Ozga, 2000). The term 'rational' used to describe this approach refers to its assumptions about actors and processes within policies. The perspective assumes that policy actors in all levels develop their 'objective' understandings of policy and make relevant decisions with a deliberation upon thorough, systematic and scientifically validated

information (Malen & Knapp, 1997). In Ball's argument, this perspective assumes that actors within policy 'share a common value-system and are working towards the same goal' (Ball, 1987, pp 30).

Further, this perspective also holds a 'technical' assumption towards the policy process or the process of change. The technical sense is revealed through the assumption that policy-makers are experts who bring innovations to the area, which mimics the innovation-efficiency linkage that used to dominate industrial enterprise in the massive-production age. While the validity of the policy has been established through rational consideration, the policy process/implementation should proceed as anticipated (Malen & Knapp, 1997). It is expected that policy flows from policy-makers to practitioners step by step and circulates according to the sequential stages. As described by Datnow: 'the causal arrow of change travels in one direction from active, thoughtful designers to passive, pragmatic implementers' (Datnow, 2006, p. 106). Therefore, research in line with this perspective usually generates the 'practice-oriented' studies (Ball, 2006; Malen & Knapp, 1997). It focuses more on the outcomes and effects of policy practice and tends to explain the results by explaining the value-free factors, such as misunderstandings, dilemmas, and external conditions that are faced by local practitioners (Ball, 2006; Hill, 1997). The 'unexpected event' is viewed a problem to be solved, and the policy itself is left without being questioned (Ball, 2006). For example, the importance of resources, the institutional structure such as class size, and the communication between central/local and policy-maker/practitioner are identified as crucial for the policy to be implemented successfully (Nixon, 1980, in Hill, 1997; Loveless, 1999).

Nonetheless, although this strand of research studies provide abundant and valuable information regarding practitioners' opinions and the factors that influence policy practice, some scholars argued that change does not solely lie in the correction of identified 'flaws';

rather, it is the contradictory opinions, contested considerations, and the diverse interests within the policy arena that shape the process of change (Ball, 1987; Blase, 2005; Datnow; 2006; Hill, 1997). Hill argued that policy analysis from a techno-rational perspective tends to ignore the fact that policy is often ambiguous and full of compromise (Hill, 1997). In this view, change exists in conflicting dynamics rather than a linear process. Studies of the second strand reviewed here utilised alternative perspectives to approach the policy process. In this strand of study, the conflicts and the interplay between the contradictory concerns and between different policy actors become the research focus.

The study conducted by Ball in England to gain an understanding of the innovation process—the adoption of mixed-ability grouping—in a comprehensive school was one example (Ball, 1981). Utilising interviews and participant observations, Ball conducted a detailed case study to discover the dynamics of change within a single school and argued that the reality of innovation/change was full of negotiation and compromise. He suggested that some seemingly neutral arguments, such as the ‘good teaching practice’ and the classification of pupils, were inevitably conditioned by peer culture, school culture, the practical problems teachers faced when teaching in diverse classrooms, and also external constraints such as external examinations. In Ball’s view, change or resistance are not independent of the influence of the contexts. Rather, change and resistance are contextualised in various arenas with the interplay of diverse ideological or practical concerns. It is the interplay between actors and their diverse arguments that shape the process of change.

Another research study that also focused on the dynamic of the process of change was a project led by Oakes et al. in the United States (Oakes, 1985). Aiming to explore the large scale de-tracking (de-streaming) reform in the US, Oakes et al. studied 10 public schools that had made efforts to de-track(de-stream) their schools. Based on their case studies and

cross-case analyses, the research team argued that ‘the de-tracking reform confronts fundamental issues of power, control, and legitimacy that are played out in ideological struggles over the meaning of knowledge, intelligence, ability and merit’(Oakes, Wells, Jones, & Datnow, 1997, p. 482). From their point of view, the resistance from some teachers was because they felt had lost familiar teaching routines and the power to interpret pupils’ ability in a conventional way; and the resistance from parents, especially the white middle-class and wealthy parents, was a result of losing the advantages of having their children placed in the higher ability tracks. They argued that in spite of the ‘comprehensive’ ideology of education since the 1950s in the US, the unequal fundamental structure of the American society, and the pervasive myth of meritocracy have contributed to the inequality in education. These fundamental factors have complicated the practice of the de-tracking reform in middle schools.

In contrast to the research that is conducted with a rational perspective, this strand of study emphasises the conflicts and the political aspects of educational policy. To scholars looking at education from this perspective, policy is not a power-free object and the process of change is not a production line that proceeds in a pre-determined direction. Rather, they assume that policy is a process that is driven by different actors’ interactions based on their power relationships and their diverse interests (Taylor et al., 1997).

Bacchi (2000) used the ‘policy-as-discourse’ concept to frame the analysis of power conflicts within policy. She suggested that policy-as-discourse analysis has two characteristics. First, the analysis breaks the simple assumption about the relationships between policy-maker and practitioner. It assumes that the problems and also the purposes of a policy are framed and interpreted by all actors based on their own power positions and ideologies, which inevitably complicate the policy process. Second, it assumes that policy is a strategic process within which conflicts are not the result of the misunderstanding of

values; rather, they are the products of value competitions. This perspective argues that there are always interests and values that compete with each other within the policy process, and this value-laden competition leads to domination, resistance and compromise. It should be noted that although this perspective emphasises the inevitable conflicts, it also recognises the unequal power distribution among policy actors that may limit 'what can be said and thought' about the policy. An example is Ball's study on the New Right educational policy in England. He argued that the agendas set by policy makers such as the market mechanism, accountability, and the value of competition quickly dominated policy practices and discussions, and also overshadowed counter arguments (Ball, 1990).

In addition, researchers who adopt this perspective often scrutinise official policy texts and counter arguments in order to highlight the unidentified issues that may be related to the embedded structures. The 'big picture' has become an important parameter for policy analysis (Ball, 2006; Popkewetize & Brennan, 1998; Ozga, 2000). Ozga (2000) suggested that educational policy is intrinsically influenced by the economic, the political, and the cultural structures. It is also argued that by studying these structures, the embedded and the evolved influence of the structural, cultural, and societal foundations on the power relationship between policy actors and on the practice of policy would be gradually revealed (Ball, 2006; Taylor et al., 1997). For example, the pattern of governmental control determines the distribution of power over different administrative levels, and a change in this control pattern often has an impact on interactions between actors and between values (Osei & Brock, 2006). Further, the cultural patterns, which are usually generated from the structure of relational dominance, usually have the ability to legitimatise certain interaction patterns that subsequently influence the process of educational policy (Jenkins, 2002; Yen, 1998). Finally, many educational policies are developed under specific imaginations that resemble the dominant functional theories of the economy. These educational policies

reflect specific assumptions with regard to the methods of quality enhancement and the process of change, which directly affect the issuing, delivery, practice, and the assessment of educational policy (Ball, 2007; Helsby, 1999).

It is recognised that the research studies that utilised different perspectives had their specific contributions to our understandings of the policy process but they also imposed limitations. For example, the problem-solving orientation of the rational perspective helps researchers to focus on the identified problems, but it may constrain the possibility for policy analysts to question the identified problems and the related power conflicts (Ball, 1987; Hill, 1997). On the other hand, the political perspective, which helps to uncover the interests competition between policy actors and the contested power relationships that shape the policy process, may ignore other factors that are also influential in shaping the policy process and policy outcomes, for example, the assessment of the actual effects of certain teaching practices (Malen & Knapp, 1997). Nevertheless, through reviewing the above research studies, we can see that the rational perspective and the political perspective should be considered as complementary in understanding an educational policy. To identify problems or solutions is usually a process where the contested interests compete with each other, and the conflict of interests does not only occur within interactions but is also embedded within seemingly neutral technical elements such as the argument of adequacy and practicality.

2.1.2.2 Implementation research in Taiwan

To gain an understanding of the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy, there were also several research studies conducted by researchers in Taiwan. Nonetheless, the majority of them utilised a rational perspective that focused on identifying the barriers to policy implementation through exploring policy actors' attitudes. The investigation on how

the competition of attitudes and interests and the interplay between policy actors influences policy and practice is scarce.

From the inception of the mixed-ability grouping policy, the attitudes of school educators and parents were important research focuses. Not long after the first issue of the policy, a government commissioned research study was conducted to understand the implementation and the attitudes of teachers, school administrators and parents towards the mixed-ability grouping policy (C-H. Chang, & S-Y. Kuo, 1984). The mixed-ability grouping policy at that moment was complicated. Only the first year of junior high level education was mandated to use mixed-ability grouping and the use of streaming was allowed in the second and the third grades. The research findings showed that most educators and parents supported the policy because it retained the advantages of both streaming and mixed-ability grouping. Educators and parents on the one hand agreed that pupils should not be differentiated based on attainments at such young ages, but they argued that in order to prepare pupils for the coming big examination the use of streaming in the second and the third grades was necessary. Similar results regarding the attitudes of educators and parents were found in other studies in which researchers found that educators' and parents' main concern about schools' grouping practice was how to strike a balance between the advantages and disadvantages of different grouping practices (C-H. Chang, & S-Y. Kuo, 1984; P-S. Chang, 2006; Y-F. Chang, 2009; Feng, 1996; Y-T. Kuo, 2006; S-F. Liu, 2004). Whilst many educators recognised that mixed-ability grouping may result in better discipline in schools and avoid early stereotyping, its possible negative effect on pupils' academic performance was of concern (C. Chou, 2005; Feng, 1996; Y-T. Kuo, 2006; S-F. Liu, 2003).

The status of the policy and the instruments the educational authority adopted to facilitate policy implementation were also identified as influencing the implementation of

the mixed-ability grouping policy. In his survey of school administrators, Feng (1996) found that the low implementation rate and the practitioners' doubts about the mixed-ability grouping policy might result from the low legal status of the policy and the rigid policy delivery process. By 'low legal status', Feng indicated that while the mixed-ability grouping policy was just one administrative order among many other policies, there was no incentive for school practitioners to change their accustomed routine. By rigid delivery process, Feng indicated that the process of delivering the mixed-ability grouping policy to schools ignored the communication between the educational authorities and the first-line practitioners. He thus suggested that educational authority should consider enforcing the mixed-ability grouping policy through law and strengthening the communication between policy makers and practitioners.

In addition, the influence of the centralised senior high school entry examination is a crucial external condition that was identified by researchers as hindering the successful implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy (W-C. Huang, C-L. Chen, & M-H. Lin, 1991; Y-H. Lo, 2000; Ma, 2005). Some studies argued that it is under the pressure of preparing pupils for the senior high school entry examination so the schools are forced to use streaming (Y-L. Chien, 2004; Y-P. Chuang, 2006; Huang, et al., 1991; Yen, 1998), and some suggested that the examination made parents become obsessed with children's academic performance, which led to their interference with the grouping practice decision in junior high schools (Y-L. Chien, 2004; Y-P. Chuang, 2006; Huang, et al., 1991; C-J. Lin, 2007; H-M. Lin, 2004; Ma, 2005; Yen, 1998). It is also found by researchers that with the influence of the senior high school entry examination, most educators had an impression that parents were against the use of mixed-ability grouping (C-H. Chang & H-Y. Kuo, 1984), and many educators argued that the demand of influential parents for using streaming or grouping higher attaining pupils was the major obstacle to the successful implementation of

the mixed-ability grouping policy (Y-P. Chuang, 2006; Huang, et al., 1991; Lo, 2000).

It is worth noting that whilst these studies identified the senior high school entry examination and parents' attitudes as barriers of policy implementation, little is known about how the school educators deal with this two 'barriers'. It seems that with the 'rational perspective', most arguments made by the previous studies viewed the influence of the senior high school entry examination and parents as external and unidirectional, and the interactions between schools and parents, and how the school educators relate the senior high school entry examination with their teaching were rarely explored.

The synthesis study conducted by Yen (1998) is a clear example that most of the mixed-ability grouping policy related research in Taiwan focuses on discovering the difficulties of policy implementation and the solutions, but ignores the conflicts and the complicated relationships between different policy actors within the policy process. Yen's study categorised all the factors previously identified as influencing the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy by existing research studies into two categories—policy content and policy context—to analyse the 'problems' with the contents of the policy and the implementation system. For example, Yen suggested that the mixed-ability grouping policy itself was initiated without an applicable implementation plan and adequate fiscal resources, which can be seen as a flaw in the contents of the policy. As for 'policy contexts', Yen argued that the senior high entry system and the rigid administration system, which he described as a bureaucratic administration that failed to deal with problems promptly, hindered the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy. His argument was that whilst the pressure of sending pupils to the highest-ranking senior high schools decreased schools' desire to adopt mixed-ability grouping, the rigid administrative system was not capable of assessing policy implementation or providing effective assistance.

After the mixed-ability grouping policy came into effect in 2004, research studies that

focused on examining the evolution and the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy started to emerge. However, the arguments made by these studies were also developed from a 'rational-technical' assumption. For example, scholars argued that the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy fitted into a 'gradualist model', which implied that the MOE intentionally promoted the use of mixed-ability grouping step by step (Y-P. Chuang, 2006; C-J. Lin, 2007). This was a clear example that previous studies tended to view the policy process as linear and rational without being aware of alternative perspectives.

In brief, in spite of the breadth of the mixed-ability grouping policy related research in Taiwan, the 'problem-identifying' assumption of the existing research limited these studies' understanding of the barriers that they identified as hindering policy implementation. As suggested earlier, scholars pointed out that this problem-solving style of policy analysis undermines the ability of research to detect the dynamic, fluid, and multi-dimensioned social relationship (Ball, 1981; Datnow, 2006; Malen & Knapp, 1997). With this lack of awareness, the subtle space that may be crucial to educational change within the interactions may be ignored. We can see that in describing the practice of the policy, most of the Taiwanese studies assumed that the social relations among policy actors were fixed, and that the identified barriers were extrinsic to them. For example, when describing the influence of the senior high school entry system, the relationship between the system and school educators was viewed as unidirectional without dialogue or struggle, which literally writes off the ability of educators to reflect upon the system and to make a difference. Another example is that although teaching and teaching materials are said to hinder the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy, careful examinations of how and why certain teaching methods and teaching materials are dominant in Taiwanese schools and how this domination influences the practices of the mixed-ability grouping policy have not been conducted.

This is the same for other 'barriers' identified. How these 'barriers' existed and

functioned within the complicated relationships between policy actors and between structure and agency has been left without exploration. Moreover, the micro-politics, namely the bargaining, contested, and the situated relationships between policy actors within or between organisations has also been left without careful exploration in the previous studies (Ball, 1987; Blase, 2005; Malen & Knapp, 1997; Malen, 2006; Mosen-Low et al., 2009; Taylor et al., 1997). Whilst many studies discussed school practitioners' attitudes, the group-level and the cross-group analysis (Ball, 1981; Blase, 2005), which emphasises the dynamics within particular systems, for example within a school or within a local educational authority, was missing.

With the recognition that the conflict of interests is one intrinsic characteristic of all kinds of human interactions (Ball, 1987; Ball, 1990; Blase, 2005), this study attempts to examine the interactions between different policy actors and their interpretations of the key issues with regard to the mixed-ability grouping within the long-term policy process. It is expected that with the alternative research perspective the understanding of the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan and the key issues involved will be expanded. In the following paragraphs, the key issues involved in the mixed-ability grouping policy and how they were presented and argued in existing research studies will be introduced and discussed. The issues include: the influence of the senior high school entry examination, teaching in mixed-ability groups and the perceptions of pupils' ability.

2.1.2.3 Key issue influencing policy practice: The senior high school entry examination

As the influence of the senior high school entry examination on the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy has been identified by scholars (W-C. Cheng, 2001; T-m. Hwang, 2008; C-W. Wang, 1995; K-S. Yang, & C-C. Yeh, 1984), the scope and the patterns

of the influence has been a topic for debate. Nevertheless, the consensus is that there is a 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi' (升學主義) permeating the Taiwanese education system, which is a complicated aggregation of phenomena that entangles with the senior high school entry system (T-m. Hwang, 2008; C-W. Wang, 1995; K-S. Yang & C-C. Yeh, 1984). Taiwanese sociologists even identified 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi' as a social problem which influences every school, every pupil and their parents in Taiwanese society (K-S. Yang & C-C. Yeh, 1984).

It is difficult to accurately translate this concept into English as the term itself contains complex meanings. As mentioned above, a general agreement among the researchers is that 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi' refers to an aggregation of several phenomena, and all of these phenomena are connected to the competition for better resources and better credentials in the education system (W-C. Cheng, 2001; T-m. Hwang, 2008; C-W. Wang, 1995; K-S. Yang & C-C. Yeh, 1984). It has been argued that with the 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi', several anti-educational school behaviours, including cramming pupils with tests, grades-competition, and the competition between schools for sending more pupils to the highest-ranking schools in the next stages, dominate the education in Taiwan (T-m. Hwang, 2008). It has also been argued that 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi' is revealed by almost every actor within the Taiwanese education system. Although in public discourse, educational authorities and school educators often blame the way that parents possessing 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi' influences educational practice, scholars argued that in many ways educational authorities and schools actually reinforce both the structure and the concept of 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi' through their everyday practice (C-W. Wang & W-Y. Lin, 1994).

There are also intense debates with regard to whether 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi' is a cultural phenomenon or that it has been resulted from political control (W-C. Cheng, 2001; K-S. Yang & C-C. Yeh, 1984). For example, in arguing for 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi' as a

cultural phenomenon, K-S. Yang and C-C. Yeh contended that the traditional value of 'academic wins it all', and 'wishing the best for children' are major contributors for the development of 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi' (K-S. Yang & C-C. Yeh, 1984). Y-C. Hwang and Y-G. Chen (2005) also indicated that in Taiwan, people considered education as not only a means for obtaining better jobs and financial gain, the level of education also represented people's social status and influenced people's self-concepts. However, it was indicated that this vein of thinking often points the finger at parents and argues that many of the anti-education actions are supported and demanded by parents (Y-W. Chang & W-Y Lin, 2002).

In another vein of thinking, scholars argued that 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi' has been shaped and reinforced by the long-established national curriculum and national standardised examination (W-C. Cheng, 2001; C-W. Wang, 1995). W-C. Cheng (2001) contended that the 'single-valued' education system narrows the imagination towards learning and teaching and contributes to the burgeoning of 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi'. C-W. Wang (1995) further pointed out that the Taiwanese education system itself keeps reinforcing 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi' through its obsession with producing high academic performance. In this sense, it is the centralised and 'single-valued' education system, and the seemingly neutral actions within the system, such as putting a great deal of effort into boosting pupils' academic performance that should be reflected on.

In fact, the studies concerning pupils' future opportunity after they were streamed into different kinds of senior high schools provide some evidence showing that the pursuit of academic achievement is related to parents' consideration of their children's future livelihood. Utilising large-scale data and longitudinal methods, researchers found that pupils who went to vocational senior high school were more likely to have lower-status jobs, be paid less, and have less opportunity to enter advanced education (Y-H. Chang et al., 1996;

T-S. Lin, 2002; Lyau, 2003). Further, a study aimed at investigating the resource distribution between different kinds of senior high school found that there was a significant disparity between the resource obtained per pupils in academic and vocational high schools. The pupil-teacher ratio in vocational high school was higher, the quality of teachers in academic high school was better, and in vocational schools pupils received less money spent on their education although these pupils in average paid more than their academic counterparts (Lyau & M-S, Liu, 2004). In other words, although there is an argument some pupils have vocational ability so that vocational high schools should be their 'rational choice', the definition of 'being rational' would be totally different when it comes to the concern of children's future livelihood.

Nonetheless, in the present we can see that most policy actors use these two concepts alternately. In the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy, the influence of parents' obsession with academic performance (cultural influence) and the senior high school entry system (structural influence) have been constantly mentioned by policy makers and practitioners (C-H.Chang & S-Y. Kuo, 1984; Y-W. Chang, & W-Y. Lin, 2002; Y-H. Hsu, 2006a; Y-H. Hsu, 2006b; T-m. Hwang, 2008). Whilst some argue that 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi' is a cultural phenomenon intrinsic in Taiwan (Y-J. Hwang & Y-G. Chen, 2005), in the policy arena many also argue that the abolition of the senior high school entry examination may improve the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy (Y-P. Chuang, 2006).

However, I find that in these abundant but mostly self-evident arguments, how 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi' and the senior high school entry system are perceived, discussed, and reacted to by policy actors within the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy is rarely discussed. This study thus includes the influence of 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi' and the senior high school entry system as one research focus. Moreover, whilst the influence of

examinations within school grouping practice was also identified in the UK (Ball, 1981; Reid et al., 1981), detailed research with regard to its mechanism of influence is lacking. With the rise of education policies that utilise examination as a means to improve performance, how pupils are labelled and positioned in schools with the change of the rationales of education 'management' is crucial in today's educational policy studies.

2.1.2.4 Key issue influencing policy practice: Perceptions of teaching and pupils' ability

In research studies regarding the adoption of mixed-ability grouping, it has been argued that the perceptions of teaching, the teaching methods applied, and the perceptions of the effects of teaching influences the practice of mixed-ability grouping (Ball, 1981; Feng, 1996; Ireson & Hallam, 2001; Y-T. Kuo, 2006; Loveless, 1999; Pan, 1999; Reay, 1998; Reid, 1981; Yen, 1998). For example, in a top-down sense that reflects the educational authority's viewpoint, there were arguments suggesting that the lack of appropriate teaching approaches of teachers hinders the practice of mixed-ability grouping (T-L. Chein, 2005; Reid et al., 1981; Yen 1998). Conversely, in a bottom-up sense that reveals local practitioners' concerns, it was found that most teachers felt teaching mixed-ability groups is more difficult than teaching streamed or set classes (C-H. Chang & H-Y. Kuo, 1984; S-F. Liu, 2004). It is also found that different teaching preferences, such as the choice between whole-class teaching and children-centred teaching, and subject-related teaching ideologies, such as the orthodox methods used to teach maths or social science, influence practitioners' attitudes and practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy (Ball, 1981; Loveless, 1999; Ireson & Hallam, 2001; Reid et al., 1981). Moreover, researchers found that different policies adopted by teachers to manage and to teach different kinds of groups had a crucial influence on pupils' motivation and attainments (Venkatakrishnan and William, 2003).

Overall, teaching is considered by both the policy makers and the practitioners to be crucial element in the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy. Whilst the above arguments expect teaching to be a professional and rational practice, there are also researchers arguing that teaching is inevitably influenced by the external conditions and the constructed framework of teaching (Ball, 1981; Bernstein, 2000; S-F. Liu, 2004; Yen, 1998). For example, the purpose of teaching, which may directly influence the teaching method adopted, may be constrained by the pursuit of pupils' academic performance or the mainstream educational ideologies. In an environment that demands performance through attainment, it would be questionable to say that teaching is a neutral practice that concerns mainly specific characteristics of knowledge. Further, the grouping structure itself is found influencing educators' teaching practice. For instance, scholars found that it is more likely for teachers to use whole-class teaching in set classes while they use more differentiated teaching and remedial teaching in mixed-ability classes (Boaler, 1997; Reay, 1998; Straková, 2007). The premise that the set classes is a 'homogeneous' class seems to have a crucial impact on a teacher's teaching. This finding also gives rise to a question about whether using a set or streamed class would facilitate teaching and learning or whether it is just an 'easy option' for teachers (Reay, 1998, p. 555). Therefore, with the intention to discover in depth the influence of educators' perceptions of teaching on the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy, the understanding of the framework that constructs the definition and the practice of teaching in different kinds of groups is imperative.

It is similar when considering policy actors' perceptions towards pupils' ability. While exploring the debates about the adoption of mixed-ability grouping within schools, a common reaction regarding pupils' ability is that more able pupils may be held back in mixed-ability groups (Ball, 1981; S-F. Liu, 2004). Terms such as more able, brighter, high flyer, and levels of difference are constantly mentioned by policy actors as rational, neutral

judgements about pupils' ability, which reflects a deep-rooted ideology that pupils' ability is innate and fixed (S-F. Liu, 2004; Oakes, 1985). Further, Oakes et al. found that although many educators started to become aware of the broader views towards ability/intelligence, for instance, to question the concept that equates intelligence with IQ and to recognise that the concept of intelligence is socially constructed, the majority of the educators were still used to viewing ability as something fixed when they discussed grouping practice (Oakes et al., 1997; Wells & Serna, 1996). In other words, the seemingly scientific, rational conceptualisation of ability dominates educators' perceptions, which influences educators' attitudes towards the adoption of mixed-ability grouping.

In addition, there is one strand of research concerning how the ideologies of the educational reform in England during the last 20 years have influenced school educators' perceptions of pupils' ability and school teachers' teaching. In the study conducted by Gillborn and Youdell (2000), they argued that 'school league tables' and the newly constructed 'discourse of educational success/failure' resulted in the forming of the 'A - to - C ranking' of schools, classes, and pupils into hierarchical groups based on academic performance. This 'A - to - C ranking' contributes to the attainment-based differentiation within schools whilst mixed-ability grouping is perceived to be ineffective at producing successful results. Furthermore, their findings show that within schools, pupils' ability is viewed as being fixed and that it can be measured through scientific IQ tests. Another research conducted by Reay (1999) also found a similar trend that under the pressure of being regularly tested, teachers' pedagogical strategies have shifted to 'teaching to the test', the adoption of streaming and setting is increasing, and the self-perceptions of pupils are dominated by the assessment result. These findings show that the ideologies valued and the mechanism adopted by the educational environment have a profound influence on teachers' teaching and teachers' and also pupils' perceptions of pupils' ability.

It is worth noting that the issue of eliminating attainment-based differentiation within school was initially (and still is) an issue that concerns the structural effects on teaching and learning. The arguments that attainment-based differentiation within school contributes to the inequality of educational opportunities through its rigid labelling of pupils and the unequal teaching quality provided to different classes have been the main reasons for the educational authorities to promote mixed-ability grouping (Y-P. Chuang, 2006; Oakes, 2000; Gamoran, 2000). In these arguments, the teaching method adopted and the perceptions of pupils' ability are attributed to the schools' grouping practices. Nonetheless, from the debates concerning the adoption of mixed-ability grouping in Taiwan, we can see that the effects of teaching and pupils' ability were often argued as neutral parameters without further explanation. Not only did very few researchers in Taiwan discuss how teaching and the perceptions of pupils' ability influences policy actors' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy, most of them only aimed to extract policy actors' opinions without further analysis.

In this study, how and why certain perceptions of pupils' ability and teaching in mixed-ability groups dominate the discussion of the policy implementation are of interest. The premise of this research focus is that educational practice should not be examined without an understanding of its wider social, political and economic construction (Whitty, 2002). This concern is also a classical issue in both the area of sociology of school knowledge and policy sociology. For example, researchers of sociology of school curriculum argue that the research questions that should be asked include: who has the power to define knowledge? How is the power exercised? And how do the political, economic and cultural values and interests influence the inclusion and exclusion of curriculum? (Apple, 1979; Popkewitz, 1991; Whitty, 1985; Young, 1994) It is argued that the same questions should also be asked when examining the contexts of educational policy

to explore whether those that were identified as unbiased and neutral were actually constructed under specific macro-societal circumstance and were maintained through specific power relationships (Ball, 1990; Popkewitz, 1991; Popkewitz, 2000; Whitty, 2002).

This study thus intends to approach these two key issues in the mixed-ability grouping policy—the perceptions of pupils’ ability and the perceptions of teaching in mixed-ability groups—from a different perspective that emphasises the development of the interpretations of these issues and links them to the ‘bigger picture’. An argument will be explored with its underlying assumptions and its wider contexts, and the alternative explanations excluded from the mainstream interpretation (if there are any) will be considered.

2.2. Scope of educational policy research

In the above sections, I discussed the different perspectives adopted for understanding the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy; in this part, I attempt to further review how different perspectives held towards the process of policy affects the research scopes of educational policy studies in the first few sections. In the latter sections, I will discuss the conceptualisation of the policy process and the theories with regard to the mechanism of power exercise among policy actors, values, and structures for the purpose of developing a suitable analytical framework to explore and to analyse the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan.

2.2.1. Educational policy research: different perspectives, different research scopes

Examining the existing educational policy analysis, it can be found that the scope and the focus of educational policy research are different with different research perspectives and different purposes.

2.2.1.1 Identifying solutions from policy and implementers

One of the strands of policy analysis is defined by Dale (1986) as the 'social administration project'. It is pointed out by scholars that this kind of analysis dominated policy studies in the 1960s and the 1970s in both the UK and the US, and is also prominent in today's policy research (Dale, 1986; Honig, 2006; Ozga, 2000). With a purpose of improving the implementation of policies and a linear and rational presumption of the policy process, the premise held by this research perspective is that policy would be able to be implemented accordingly by closing the gap between policy and implementers (Honig, 2006; Ozga, 2000). Therefore, the research focuses of this strand of policy analysis are the characteristics of policy and the reactions of individual implementers to the policy. For example, in a framework developed by Sabatier and Mazmanian (1980) to understand the implementation of a policy, the coherence and the clarity of policy, the behaviours of target groups, and public awareness of the policy problems were the main issues discussed. It is also pointed out that this school of policy research emphasises that the provision of suitable incentives and effective instructions and the forming of consensus are crucial in facilitating policy implementation (Honig, 2006). Nevertheless, in spite of the thoroughness of this strand of study in documenting the characteristics of educational policy, such as the instruments adopted to facilitate policy implementation, and the general reactions of policy implementers, the 'why' questions, such as why policy implementers in different contexts react differently to the same policies seems to seize less attention.

2.2.1.2 Exploring the relationship between actors and local contexts

After the 1970s, educational policy studies in the UK and the US both started to expand its research scope with the input of sociological, organizational and psychological perspectives. The relationship between policy actors and the influence of local contexts on

actors' attitudes and reactions began to gain researchers' attention. For example, in the UK, Ball (1987) argued that previous policy research rarely considered the contexts of schools when exploring the implementation of educational policy. Therefore he utilised the political lens to gain an understanding of the struggles and the conflicts that resulted from innovation within a school for the purpose of better explaining first-line educators' attitudes and actions towards an educational innovation. In the US, Weatherley and Lipsky(1977) examined the special education reform by looking at local actors' engagement in policy implementation. The term 'street-level bureaucracy' was developed to describe the autonomous micro-politics of local organisations. The Rand change agent study conducted in the US, which aimed to understand the federal funded innovation in schools, also argued that local actors created a contextualised balance by reconciling authority's demands with the conditions framed by local contexts (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976, 1978). The concept of 'mutual adaptation' was proposed to replace the previous techno-rational assumption to understand the reconciliation of central policy and local educators (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976, 1978).

The role of the state has also become an important issue. Departing from the rational perspective, the state has been critically examined to find out how the education system is endowed with bureaucratic, political, and economic characteristics through the governance of the state (Apple, 1995; Dale, 1989). Research studies that aimed to understand the role of the state flourished after the 1980s and 1990s when the education reform wave spread in many countries. Education reform during this period, which attempted to change the mechanism of educational governance, revealed dramatic ideological change in the management of public education (Ball, 1994; Gewirtz et al., 1995; Whitty, 2002). In the UK, the influence of the market or the quasi-market mechanism on the quality and equality of public education has become a research focus ever since (Ball, 1994; Gewirtz et al., 1995;

Hodgson & Spours, 2006; Whitty & Power, 2002a).

As suggested by scholars, countries in different regions of the world began to introduce educational policies that explicitly or implicitly promote market principles in the education system after the 1980s (Croxford & Raffe, 2007; Whitty & Power, 2002a, 2002b). The logic of the market mechanism-- utilising the interests of consumers and the competition among suppliers to boost the quality of supply—is considered to be reasonable and efficient to enhance the quality and also the diversity of the public services under the ideology of new-liberalism (Gerwitz, et al., 1995). Nonetheless, one important criticism of the educational market is its rhetoric of power devolution. Whilst the market mechanism is argued as facilitating school-based management and enhancing the quality of education, researchers argue that the introduction of the market mechanism in fact reinforces the state's hidden control, which not only unifies rather than diversifies schooling, but also cloaks the indigenous inequality (Malen, 2003; Whitty & Power, 2002a, 2002b).

The mid-level actors of the education system, such as the local educational authorities and the districts have also been explored. It can be seen in the UK, the US and also in Taiwan that the market mechanism and the power devolution within the education system give the mid-level actors new responsibilities within the policy process and also create new patterns of interaction between policy actors (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992; Y-P. Chuang, 2006; Honig, 2004). In addition, the influence of non-system actors in the educational policy process has also gained more attention in the research arena. Although back in the late 70s, the influence of interest groups and the 'policy elites' started to be explored (Kogan, 1975, 1978), the 'partners' of education, including parents, the community, burgeoning interest groups, and business organisations that have gradually gained an influential position in the educational arena, have also attract more research attentions at present. Both the influences and the characteristics of these groups are probed by researchers (Coburn, 2005; Mawhinney,

2001; McPherson & Raab, 1988; Raab, 1992; Sipple & Killeen, 2004; Sipple, Killeen & Monk, 2004; Vincent & Martin, 2005).

2.2.1.3 Attend to larger contexts and embedded structures

On the other hand, we can see that contemporary policy studies put more efforts into exploring the relationships between the wider influence of society and the process of educational policy. The tradition of sociology of education to attend to the influence of economic, class, cultural, and political structures, which has long been adopted to analyse curriculum reforms (Bernstein, 2000; Apple, 1995; Apple, 1996; Whitty, 2002), has been applied more extensively in educational policy studies. In this strand of research, researchers utilise sociological imagination to explore not only the interactions between policy actors, but also the organisations and the structures the policy actors are involved in (Ozga, 2000; Whitty, 2002). For example, the class structure in society has long been found to contribute to the design of the education system and the competition over educational status (Power, 1994; Wells & Serna, 1997); and the influence of politics, which can be detected from the forms of governmental control and power distribution, was found to have a profound effect on the interactions between policy actors in different administrative levels (Karlsen, 2000; Osei & Brock, 2006). Moreover, cultural values that have been embedded in certain societies, such as Confucius' 'Yin-Tsai-Shih-Chiao' ideology (因材施教: teaching in accordance with pupils' ability) that is commonly believed in Taiwanese society, or the concept of 'equality', which is interpreted differently in different societies were also argued as dominating educational policy discourse and school practice (Raveaud, 2005; Yen, 1998). In a study that compared the construction of differentiated learning in French and English primary schools, Raveaud (2005) found that the different social and historical contexts of France and England contributed to their difference in the concept of equality and further

influence educators' attitudes towards differentiated learning and educators' teaching practice in schools.

In addition, in the past twenty years, the research on the relationship between globalisation and education policy is prominent. (Ball, 1998; Dale, 2005; Green, 1997; Kupfer, 2008; Moore, 2007; Ozga and Lingard, 2007). Ozga and Lingard (2007) identified three important topics in this study area. The first concerns the balance between international forces and local characteristics, which may further influence the politics of education and the politics of change within specific contexts. The second aims to understand the transformation of governance technology under international influence. They argued that under the international comparative context, the change of educational governance, such as utilising data-based and comparative-based governance for the purpose of producing 'world-competitive' educational results, is worthy of investigation with regards to its influence on the quality and equality of education. The third important topic in this area is related to the position of educational policy research. In their observation, policy research nowadays is once again more to be expected to produce solutions for problems related to the globalised competition and within the rhetoric of pursuing economic profits through knowledge.

In brief, the above discussions review the scope of different educational policy research. It is argued that not only the sense of actors, the sense of location (institutional positions), and the sense of structure (political, economic and cultural influences) should be kept in mind by educational policy researchers (Honig, 2006; Malen, 2006). The sense of time, which reveals the embedded 'historical, structural, and ideology contradictions', is also argued as crucial to be considered in policy analysis (Ball, 2006; Grace, 1995, p3; McLaughlin, 2008). The term 'policy trajectory study' is given by Ball to studies that included a time factor. Policy trajectory, as he argued, 'traces through the development,

formation and realization of those policies from the context of influence, through policy text production, to practice and outcomes' (Ball, 2006, p 17). It is indicated that through exploring different contexts within the policy process over time, the knowledge of a specific policy will be enhanced, and the relationships between different contexts of the policy process and the struggles of the meanings and actions in a policy will be unearthed (Ball, 2006; McLaughlin, 2008).

As reviewed above, the majority of the existing research on the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan focused on criticising the governance of the policy and exploring first-line practitioners' attitudes towards the policy. The lack of investigation of different levels of policy actors and their interactions within the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy limits the ability for these studies to understand and to explain the mixed-ability grouping policy implementation in Taiwan. Further, the changing political, societal and economic environments of the policy, which may shape the governance and also policy actors' interactions within the policy process, have never been taken into consideration. Informed by the above review, this study proposes to investigate the long-term mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan through attending to its changing political, societal and economic environments, and the interactions of policy actors in different levels. It is expected that through the analysis, we cannot only learn about the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan in a more dynamic manner, but also understand and explain the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan in its own political, economic and societal contexts.

2.2.2. The Policy Process Conceptualisation

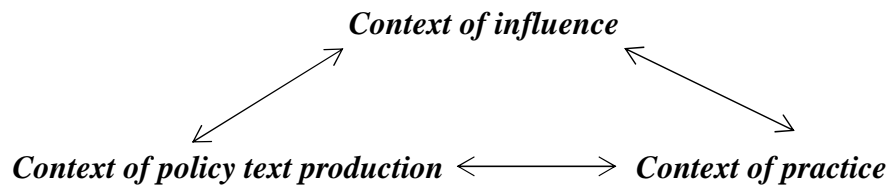
In order to capture the contested complexity and the process of educational policy in a more coherent way, the conceptualisation of the policy process developed by Bowe et

al.(1992) and the modification made by later researchers will be reviewed in the following sections, which will serve as the basis for developing an analytical framework for this study. The criticisms of the framework regarding its assumption of power distribution among policy actors will also be discussed (Hatcher & Troyna, 1994; Fitz, Halpin, & Power, 1994; Raab, 1994).

2.2.2.1 Policy cycle

In their book 'Reforming Education and Changing Schools: Case Studies in Policy Sociology', Bowe, Ball and Gold characterised the policy process as a 'continuous policy cycle', which contains three contexts that interact with each other (Bowe et al., 1992). In contrast to other frameworks that describe the policy process as proceeding through different stages with a sequential premise, the concept of 'policy cycle' intends to provide a conceptualisation that emphasises the complicated interactions between the major contexts within the policy process. Three contexts are proposed in the framework: the context of influence, the context of policy text production, and the context of practice (see Figure 1 below). The context of influence is identified as the context where public policy is initiated and reinitiated by the influence of different groups that exert competing discourses. The context of policy text production is the second context identified, and it is argued that in the process of policy text formation, policy actors from different positions are 'in competition for control of the representation of policy' (p.21). The third identified context is the context of practice. Whilst many studies use the term 'implementation' to describe the stage after the delivery of policy, Bowe et al. chose to use the word 'practice' for the purpose of emphasising the contested responses of the policy actors in this context.

Figure 1: The conceptualisation of policy cycle



Bowe et al. contended that this conceptualisation has two different assumptions about the policy process in comparison to previous conceptualisations. The first is that the 'policy cycle' does not assume that the policy process is a linear process, rather, it views the policy process as a dynamic and cyclical course within which contexts interact with one another and policy actors compete for power overtly and covertly in every context. The second difference is the research perspective adopted to view power relationships in the 'policy cycle'. Departing from the traditional structural sense, the policy cycle's conceptualisation suggests that conflicts within the process of policy should be explained by the post-structural approach. In the post-structural sense, power is viewed as existing in the relationships between actors and the 'domination' is often obscured and legitimised (Foucault, 1980; Popkewitz, 1991). In this sense, conflicts, competition, and the cyclical characteristic of policy are key research issues.

To refine this conceptualisation, Ball (1994) later added two contexts into this conceptualisation of the policy process. One is the context of outcome, which he characterised as the second order effect of policy (other than the effects of the practice). The context reminds policy actors and researchers to examine the policy outcomes in terms of social justice, equality and individual freedom rather than only considering the implementation rate of educational policy. The last context added is the context of political strategy. This is a context where policy analysis and scholars evaluate educational

policy and develop strategies to tackle difficulties that may hinder the realisation of quality and justice. Both of these contexts provide policy researchers with a refined lens to examine the objectives and the influences of educational policy.

2.2.2.2 The role of the state and the power relationships between policy actors

The major criticism of the concept of 'policy cycle' concerns the assumptions of the power relationships between policy actors. While Bowe et al. emphasised the flexible power relationships between different policy actors, other scholars argued that the power of the state/centre was relatively underestimated in their conceptualisation of the policy process (Fitz et al., 1994; Hatcher & Troyna, 1994).

The role of the state has been discussed in detail by policy researchers for years. There was a period when scholars viewed the state (and education) as neutral without following specific ideology. Later, scholars from a critical tradition started to examine the ideologies carried by the state and their influence on the objectives, the issuing, the formation, and the execution of policy (Dale, 1989; Hill, 1997). Although in this school of thinking, the policy process is also viewed as dynamic and contested, scholars criticise the concept of 'policy cycle' falsely treating different policy actors as having equal power to influence the policy process (Fitz et al., 1994; Hatcher & Troyna, 1994). Fitz et al. (1994) provided a further explanation of the role of the state. They argued that the state not only has the power to define and interpret policy, but it also has the legitimate authority to distribute resources and design a mechanism, which will inevitably direct the route of the policy practice. Boyd (1990) also suggested that the state is not only an actor inside the policy process, rather, the state is the 'centre' that can change mechanisms, design or change the purpose of educational institutions, and take legitimate actions towards other policy actors.

Whilst the power of the state is a contentious issue, Ball (1994) contented that their emphasis on the power struggle between policy actors does not imply the negligence of the central power. Rather, he suggested that through a careful examination of the unattended micro-level power relationships, the previously left unexplained approaches that the powerful adopted to exert their influence can be explored in more detail.

It would be useful to discern the different constructions of how the state exercises its influence here. One concept that is often adopted is the concept of 'hegemony'. In a sociological sense, hegemony indicates a relationship that is constituted through 'the saturation of ideology' within which actors passively give consent to the dominant ideology (Apple, 1979; Apple, 1995; Mao, 2001). In Gramsci's argument, the state is the initiator of hegemony as it utilises 'hegemonic apparatuses', such as schools and courts to deliver and maintain dominance. The key point is that through the exercise of hegemony, most actors within the system would conform to and identify themselves with the dominant ideology if the critical reflection of agencies is missing. Apple (1979) further elaborates the concept of hegemony by arguing that while being aware of the decisive position of the state, one cannot view the relationship as unidirectional and technical. The micro-politics, such as the conflicts and the resistance that exist within the process could also create the space for autonomy. In this sense, the maintenance of dominant power requires the ability to attend to, to debate and further to absorb the resistance. It is argued that the revision of the curriculum, and the discourses created to justify and legitimise the curriculum are the manifestations of such mechanism (Apple, 1979).

Another perspective adopted to conceptualise the power relationship between the macro-societal influence and education views power in a more dynamic sense. Derived from the post-structuralism tradition, this perspective questions the oppressor/oppressed dichotomy of the power relationship (Popkewitz, 1991). That is, instead of directly positing

the political, economic or cultural structures or the state as the sole source of power, power is argued as existing in not only the macro but also the micro relationships that influence the everyday practice of society, including education. It is through the 'interactions' between the macro-social influence and the micro-politics that specific sets of values and practices are internalised as common sense (Popkewitz, 1991; Mao, 2004). In this school of thinking, it is not the 'external structures' that serve as the sole oppressors, it is the actors within the relationships along with the structures that together reinforce the power through competition, conflicts, and interest-based compromise. It should be noted that it is not to say that structural influences do not exist, rather, the influences are usually articulated as sets of arguments, ideals, regulations, and practices in order to enter agency's everyday life.

It can be seen that the two latter perspectives argue that within a structure-agency power relationship, actors are not just passive receivers, rather, actors may on the one hand internalise specific sets of values and practice within specific environments that have bounded by rules, regulations, styles, and also situated interests; they may also, on the other hand, create autonomy through reflection, criticism and resistance (Apple, 1979; Popkewitz, 1991). Informed by this concept, this study proposes to investigate the influence of macro-societal influence on Taiwanese educational practice through this critical lens in order to examine some unquestioned sets of values and practice. For example, whilst the senior high school entry examination and the centralised education system has been criticised as complicating the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy, I intend to utilise this analytical perspective to further investigate policy actors' perceptions, interpretations, and also internalisation of the values embedded in the system. It is expected that through this way of exploration, the complicated relationships between the system and the policy actors, and the influence of these complicated relationships on the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy can be unfolded.

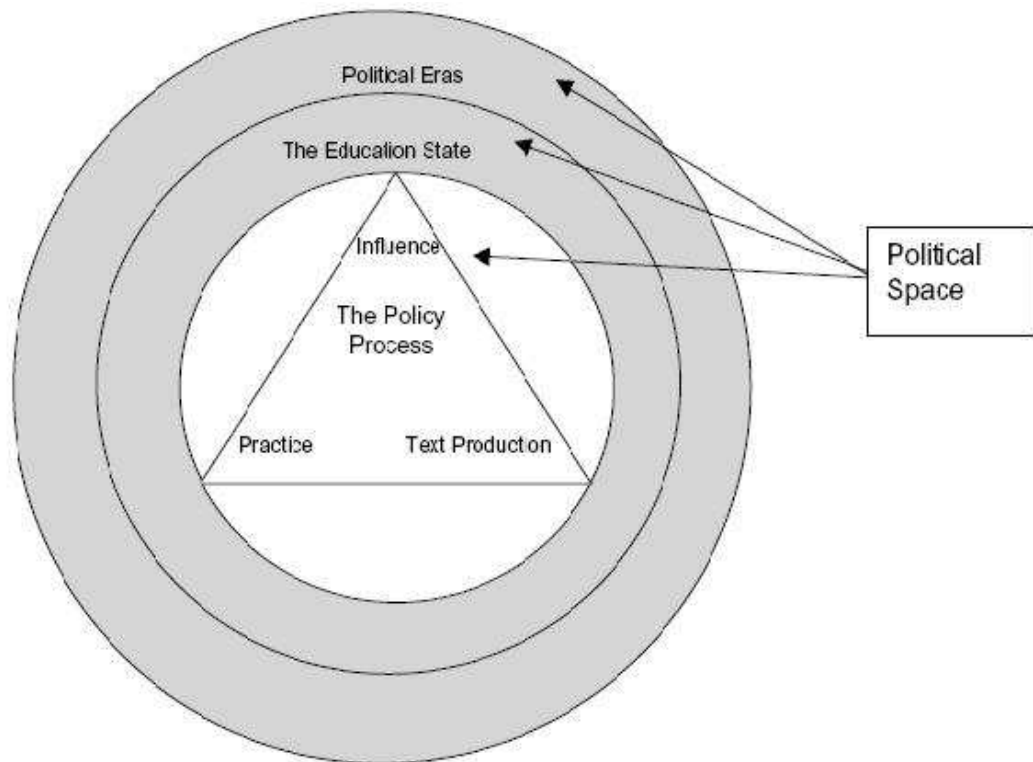
2.2.2.3 Modification of the 'policy cycle'

After the proposal of the 'policy cycle', several modifications were made by scholars in order to better utilise this conceptualisation for policy studies (Hodgson & Spours, 2006; Lingard, 1996; Raab, 1994; Vidovich, 2003).

Vidovich (2003) adopted the model with the addition of researching policy actors in different positions in each context of the policy process to explore the Australian higher education policy. She used the term macro, intermediate, micro, and mini-micro to describe the centre educational authority, the local educational authority, university and grassroots university educators who are involved in the process of the higher education policy. Vidovich argued that by using the modified model, actors in different positions can be clearly identified and examined, and the influence of the state would not be ignored. Further, she highlighted the importance of exploring the 'inter linkages' between different levels and also different contexts to see how different contexts and different levels of policy actors interact with one another.

Hodgson and Spours (2006) later adopted the concept of the policy cycle as one of their analytical tools in the framework they developed to understand the 14-19 reform in England. It is indicated that the concept of the policy cycle helps to highlight the 'dynamic, contested and cyclical nature of the policy process' (Hodgson & Spours, 2006, pp 689). Other than the policy cycle, other analytical tools adopted in this framework include political eras, the education state, and the operation of political space (See figure below).

Figure 2: The analytical framework



As shown in the above figure, political eras represent the period of time when specific political and educational ideologies work upon the constitution of the education state and the ‘policy cycle’ of educational policy. In the case of the 14-19 reform in England, Hodgson and Spours argued that the ‘ideology of marketisation’ and the ‘divisive approach to education system expansion’ envelop the process of the policy (Hodgson & Spours , 2006, pp 686). Although they discussed the alternative proposal with regard to the expansion of the upper secondary education system, for example, a comprehensive approach, they argued that the alternative ideology was not strong enough to constitute a new political era due to the lack of corresponding contexts, including the political, cultural, economic and societal contexts that were needed for shaping a new equilibrium.

The importance of placing an educational policy in the wider social and economic

contexts for the purpose of better understanding the ideologies and the process of the policy has been emphasised by researchers (Ozga, 2000; Taylor et al., 1997). In the argument of Hodgson and Spours, referring to the wider contexts of educational policy would prevent 'policy amnesia' that restrains the opportunity for policy makers to learn from previous experience. It is argued in this study that the same principle should be applied when analysing a long-term policy. Whilst there are many research studies which discuss the contexts of educational policies, most of them discuss the contexts within a specific moment. There are rare studies tracing a single policy that has experienced the change of political eras and the corresponding changing education states. The evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan provides this study with an opportunity to further investigate that how an educational policy is interpreted, promoted, reacted to and disputed in different political eras with different patterns of policy actors' interactions.

Another analytical tool identified by Hodgson and Spours is the education state. They suggested that the education state is the manifestation of political eras. In their definition, the education state is not only composed of the governmental institutions, such as educational authorities and schools. Rather, different kinds of educational policy stakeholders, including the pressure groups, the individuals and the media are all parts of the education state. They argued that by attending to various policy actors within the policy process, the influence of the degree of power centralisation and the interplay between actors in different positions can be better understood. They also argued that a more devolved system represents a better balance between different levels of institutions, which may lead to a more 'deliberate judgement' of educational policy. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the devolved system may have diverse characteristics and different forms of power distribution (Karlsen, 2000). Thus its influence on the process of educational policy requires a more contextualised examination. This is an area that requires further research.

The last analytical tool included in the framework is 'political space'. Hodgson and Spours identified it as the space that is opened up for actors to participate in the policy process. According to their argument, the space can be created by a risk that everybody recognises, by the 'battle of ideas over a period of time', or by institutions as a formal routine to welcome discussions and debates (Hodgson & Spours, 2006, pp690). Further, political space can exist through the whole policy cycle, in any level of the education state and in any political era. Hodgson and Spours view this dimension as an indication of the degree of openness in a policy process, which also reveals the balance of power distribution.

The analytical framework created by Hodgson and Spours combines the advantages of the concept of 'policy cycle' and the criticisms of it. The analysis of political eras recognises the central status of the state and also the influence of the political, social and economic contexts, while the conceptualisation of the education state still pays close attention to the influence of policy actors in different positions and their interactions. It is suggested by Hodgson and Spours' that the framework would help to trace the historical development of the policy, to understand the current condition, and also to criticise current policy-making.

This research attempts to adopt the analytical framework developed by Hodgson and Spours(2006) to explore the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy. By looking into the political eras, the education state, the policy cycle and the political space of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan, this study explores the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan through understanding the underpinning structures, the ideologies debated and the interactions between policy actors. Further, by exploring the 'interactions' between the wider contexts and policy actors, and between different policy actors, the exercise of power within the mixed-ability grouping policy and its influence on the process of the policy will be revealed. Finally, whilst the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan has existed for a long period, whether the changing political eras and the

changing education states influence the policy cycle and the political space of the mixed-ability grouping policy would be one specific concern in this research.

2.3. Analytical framework rearticulated and research questions

To summarise, this study attempts to investigate the long-term process of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan from a contextualised manner and a ‘political’ perspective which pays attention to the contested attitudes and actions of policy actors and the interaction between them. The framework developed by Hodgson and Spours that includes the analysis of the wider contexts (political, economic and societal contexts), different policy actors and the continuous policy cycle of educational policy is adopted in this research. The research questions proposed in this research are as follows:

Under the influence of the wider contexts (political, economic and societal contexts),

1. How have the power relationships between policy actors influenced the practice of the policy?
2. How has the mixed-ability grouping policy evolved till today?
3. How have the policy actors’ perceptions of pupils’ ability and the interpretation of pupils’ ability in policy texts influenced the practice of the policy?
4. How have the policy actors’ perceptions of teaching in mixed-ability groups and the interpretation of teaching in mixed-ability groups in policy texts influenced the practice of the policy?
5. How has the senior high school entry examination influenced the practice of the policy?

The contribution of this research is twofold. First, although there were already several research studies conducted to understand the mixed-ability grouping policy/innovation, few of them considered the combined and complicated influences of the wider contexts (political, economic and societal contexts), the power relationships between policy actors in different

levels, and the conflicts between ideologies on the policy process of the mixed-ability grouping policy. This is an important angle that should be included in the study of the mixed-ability grouping innovation because the effects of grouping practice within schools touch on the foundation issues in education, such as the concepts of equity, equality and social justice; and these key concepts are all related to the dominant ideologies of the wider contexts. Second, the attention placed on the influence of the senior high school entry system on the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy will add a valuable understanding of this identified but under-explored mechanism. Whilst in the UK and the US research studies regarding the influence of the emphasis of pupil attainments and the high-stake testing has emerged, the long history of utilising centralised examination to decide pupils' future learning path in Taiwan provides an opportunity to explore how the examination influences the teaching and learning in schools and also the policy actors' attitudes towards schools' grouping practice.

Chapter 3 : Research method

3.1. Research Design Overview

Following on the framework developed by Hodgson and Spours(2006) in chapter 2, this next section explores the research design to be employed and the issues faced in trying to capture the views of diverse actors in the policy process.

This framework helped to inform the development of the research questions and decisions being made about possible participants. As demonstrated in the end of last chapter, the research questions were developed with an intuitive question—why has not the mixed-ability grouping policy been implemented as expected? Five questions were subsequently developed as follows:

1. How have the power relationships between policy actors influenced the practice of the policy?
2. How has the mixed-ability grouping policy evolved till today?
3. How have the policy actors' perceptions of pupils' ability and the interpretation of pupils' ability in policy texts influenced the practice of the policy?
4. How have the policy actors' perceptions of teaching in mixed-ability groups and the interpretation of teaching in mixed-ability groups in policy texts influenced the practice of the policy?
5. How has the senior high school entry examination influenced the practice of the policy?

Further, as suggested earlier, the attempt to utilise the Hodgson and Spours' analytical framework is to understand the evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy and to investigate the contested issues within the policy from a contextualised and a 'political' perspective, a research design that combines various strategies for exploring the contexts, the policy cycle, and the complicated relationships between policy actors of the

mixed-ability grouping policy was thus developed for this study. Documentary analysis, questionnaire survey of junior high school principals, interviews with officers in educational authorities and case studies of junior high schools were employed to answer my research questions.

To explore the wider contexts of the mixed-ability grouping policy, documentary analysis of the existing official documents, including legislation, regulations, policies and crucial speeches, and relevant research studies that analysed and described the political, social, economic and educational contexts in these recent thirty years was conducted in this study. As pointed out by McCulloch: ‘documents can provide potent evidence of continuity and change in ideals and in practices, in private and in the public arena. They are significant mediums through which to understand the way in which our society has developed, and how it continues to develop. Yet they also reflect a basic tension in our society, a rupture between its present and its past’ (McCulloch, 2004, p. 7). In other words, continuity, changes and also tensions in the development of society can be mapped out through carefully conducted documentary analysis. It is thus a proper tool to explore the wider contexts that have exerted their wide-range of influences into different aspects of society.

Further, documentary analysis was also applied in exploring the evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy for the purpose of reconstructing the past through examining key documents and records. The exploration of evolution in this study is defined as tracing the policy from its inception to the present day, within which the three interconnected contexts within the ‘policy cycle’ are the focuses of the study. Therefore, in addition to documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews, case studies, and a questionnaire survey that aim to extract primary data directly from current policy actors were also conducted in this study. The purpose of combining several research strategies is to utilise the strengths of each strategy to not only trace the evolution of the policy, but also to approach the policy

actors in different levels of the education system and understand policy actors within their own local contexts.

As suggested in the previous chapter, the process of an educational policy is shaped by the complicated and contested relationships between policy actors and the influences of the wider contexts. Although due to the limited resources, the relationships between the major policy actors, including the educational authorities, school educators, parents, pupils, and influential interest groups in the past were mainly explored through existing documents. This study also utilised semi-structured interviews with educational authorities, a questionnaire survey of junior high school principals and case studies of two selected schools to study policy actors for the purpose of investigating their perceptions and interpretations of the policy and the contested issues, and their understandings of their own local and also wider contexts at the present. Further, the case studies were specifically designed for the purpose of exploring the decision-making process and the concerns about grouping practice within individual schools.

Scholars have suggested that the utilisation of different research strategies is helpful in exploring phenomena with enhanced depth and breadth (Burgess, 1984; Gorard & Taylor, 2004; McCulloch, 2004). Burgess indicated that every research strategy has its own strength and weakness regarding specific research problems (Burgess, 1984). Therefore, adopting multiple strategies in the field helps the researchers to address both the theoretical and practical concerns. For example, in explaining the combination of documentary analysis and interviews in his research, Duke (2002) pointed out: 'with the documentary analysis informing the direction and focus of the interviews and providing historical and contextual data, while the interviews influenced further analyses and explorations of the documents.' (p. 43). Moreover, it is also argued that through considering different settings of an educational policy, such as the wider contexts and the policy actors in different positions, researchers

will have the opportunity to gain a ‘well-grounded understanding of the complicated mechanisms by which economic, political and social constraints on teaching and learning are filtered down to school levels’ (Hargreaves, 1985, p. 43). In this study, it was expected that through combining several research strategies, this study would have the strengths to link the past to the present, to perceive both the macro and the micro, and to capture the conflicts within their own micro and macro contexts.

An overview of the research design is presented in the diagram below. In later sections, the process of utilising different strategies to collect data from different sources will be presented in section 3.3, and the data analysis approach will be explained in section 3.4.

Table 1 : Research design overview

Purpose	Objective	Strategy	Source and Subject
To explore the contexts	Explore the political, economic, societal and educational contexts in the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy	Documentary analysis	1. Governmental documents including legislations, major policies, public announcements, statistical data and other relevant documents 2. Academic research studies that are related to the embedded social, political and economic structures
To understand the evolution of the policy	Trace the process-the cyclical policy cycle of the mixed-ability grouping policy and the relationships between different policy actors	1. Documentary analysis 2. In-depth Interviews	1. Governmental documents including legislations, major policies, public announcements, statistical data and other relevant documents obtained from the Ministry of Education and local educational authorities 2. School level policy texts 3. Documents, research studies, and announcements collected from influential Interest groups 4. The public opinions delivered by research studies and the media 5. Media reports
	Explore the current practice of targeted counties	Questionnaire survey	All junior high school principals in two selected counties
	Explore the decision-making process and the concerns in individual schools	1. Case studies of schools (Utilising in-depth interviews and documentary analysis)	Two schools in the two selected counties (One in each county).
	Explore the governance, the challenges , and the situated considerations of the Ministry of Education	1. In-depth interviews 2. Documentary analysis	The Ministry of Education
	Explore the governance, the challenges, and the situated considerations of the local authority	1. In-depth interviews 2. Documentary analysis	Two selected counties' local educational authorities

3.2. Understanding the contexts: collecting documents

Two categories of documents were collected for the purpose of exploring the wider contexts including the political, economic, societal and educational contexts of the mixed-ability grouping policy. I obtained these documents through governmental online database and the National Library in Taiwan which keeps all the governmental documents, academic studies and newspapers.

First, legislations, governmental bulletins, and major policies that are relevant to the mainstream political, economic and educational ideologies were collected to examine their possible influence on the process of educational policies, the education system, and the interaction patterns between policy stakeholders. For example, the Martial Law, the national development and construction plans, the legislations about the governmental system in Taiwan, and the legislations and the policies with regards to the purpose of education, the education system, the teaching training system and the curriculum at compulsory education level were scrutinised. Statistical data such as the national and local average senior high school entry rates, pupils' family socio-economic status of the schools and local educational authorities researched were also collected as the basis to establish the contexts of the practice of the policy in the educational authorities and in the schools.

Secondly, research studies that are relevant to the development and the transformation of Taiwanese political, economic, and societal environments were also collected. There were abundant research studies which discussed the changing political regimes in Taiwan, and a handful of studies which discussed the transformation of Taiwanese education before and after the abolition of Martial Law and the education reform. I examined these studies to identify various perspectives and explanations and to compare them with my own interpretations of the official documents for the purpose of developing a refined

understanding of the wider contexts in the long process of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan.

3.3. Investigating the evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy: collecting documents, a questionnaire survey, semi-structured interviews, instrumental case studies

As suggested above, the exploration of the evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy utilised several different strategies to approach different policy actors and the past and the present of the policy process. In this section, the process of utilising these strategies, the documents collected and the subjects approached in this part of study will be presented.

Here I firstly introduce the research scope, namely the policy actors included in the study in the evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy. As shown in Table 1, in documentary analysis I paid attention to all the major and influential policy actors in the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy; but I also approached some policy actors through interviews, a questionnaire survey and case studies in order to obtain primary data from key policy actors. Due to the limited resources, this part of research was confined to researching the policy actors in the traditional education system which included two officers in the MOE, two officers in two local educational authorities and the principal, the director of teaching affairs and five teachers in two junior high schools.

Further, in order to not only gain an understanding of policy actors in different positions of the education system, but also to connect them with one another for the purpose of examining their relationships, I chose the junior high schools in the researched local educational authorities as research subjects in order to contextualise the policy practice of the schools within their local contexts. The relationships between these research subjects' positions in the education system are illustrated in figure 3 below followed by a table that

provides the overview of the exploration of the evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy. The execution of the research, including the selection of local educational authorities and schools and the study process are introduced in the following sections.

Figure 3: Research subjects and their relationships

(the dotted lines indicate weaker statutory influences based on the Local Government Law, and the arrows indicate the direction of influence)

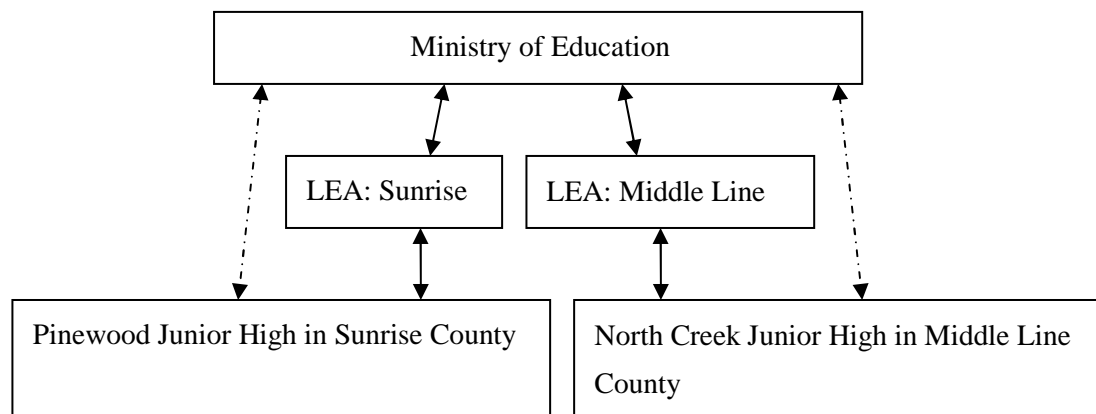


Table 2: The overview of the research of the evolution of the policy

Strategy	Subjects	Key informants	Research period
Documentary Analysis	[Please see Table 3 for detailed introduction]		June, 2007 --July, 2009
A Questionnaire survey	All schools in the two educational authorities studied	School principal	September & October, 2007
Instrumental Case study (see section 3.3.5)	Pinewood junior high school (Sunrise County)	1. Principal 2. Director of teaching affairs 3. Five teachers who teach the five main subjects	Late November to December, 2007
Instrumental Case study (see section 3.3.5)	North Creek junior high school (Middle Line County)	1. Principal 2. Director of teaching affairs 3. Five teachers who teach the five main subjects	Later April to May, 2008
Semi-structured Interview	LEA: Sunrise County	The officer in charge of the mixed-ability grouping policy in the two counties	June, 2008
Semi-structured Interview	LEA: Middle Line County	The officer in charge of the mixed-ability grouping policy in the two counties	June, 2008
Semi-structured Interview	Ministry of Education	The officers in charge of the mixed-ability grouping policy (The chief officer and the main officer in the fourth section of the Department of Compulsory Education)	July, 2008

3.3.1. Ethical Guidelines

This part discusses the ethical issues raised from approaching research participants.

Scholars suggested that building a research relationship between a researcher and a participant requires guidelines to fulfil the objectives of respecting the participant and keeping him/her away from harm (Marvasti, 2004; Silverman, 2006). It is the responsibility of the researcher to make sure that participants understand the objectives of the research and

that the participant agrees to do the research voluntarily. Also, the participants have to be aware of the way in which their words and actions will be utilised, and that they can withdraw from the research at any point (Silverman, 2006).

In this research, other than documentary analysis, which mainly examines the information that is available to the public, the interviews and the questionnaire survey were both conducted with the participants' consent. The questionnaires sent to principals were sent with a letter that stated the objectives of the research, the researcher's identification, the participants' right to withdraw, the application of the data (to be analysed in a PhD thesis and to be published in academic papers), and the promise of anonymity. The same statement was also provided to my interviewees in the two junior high schools at the time of contact and again at the beginning of each interview. Both the participants and I signed the consent forms, in Mandarin and in English. The consent for digital recording was also requested at the beginning of every interview. The only exception with the provision of anonymity was the interview with two officers in the MOE. The main reason was that they were central level governmental employees who could be identified easily. Both interviewees in the MOE also agreed that most of the interview's content could be publicly discussed and non-anonymity was agreed.

Further, in order to make sure that participants have the opportunity to clear and confirm their utterance, which may help increase the credence of the description and analysis in the research, all recorded interviews were transcribed and sent back to participants (via email or post) for content confirmation.

3.3.2. Documents collected for understanding the evolution of the policy

In examining documents related to policy, Ozga (2000) indicated that policy texts make

it possible to examine policy over time. She identified that policy texts, which include formal policy texts and relevant materials chosen by researchers, can help convey three kinds of issues: the source of the policy, the scope of the policy, and the pattern of the policy.

The documents collected in this study for investigating the evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy aimed to achieve the following objectives: 1) mapping out the process of the policy through tracing the context of influence, the context of policy text production and the context of policy practice; 2) exploring different stakeholders' documented attitudes and actions towards the policy; 3) gathering information and opinions about the 'barriers' of the policy practice that were identified by previous research; 4) gathering information and opinions regarding the senior high school entry system and the selection mechanism within the Taiwanese education system.

The documents analysed were collected from five categories as shown in the diagram below and explained in successive paragraphs, and the analysis approach will be presented in section 3.4. These five categories of documents provided different key information that was needed in this study. Other than the formal policy texts that recorded the 'official interpretations' of the mixed-ability grouping policy, the documents collected from policy actors in different position (e.g., the MOE, the local educational authority, the school, different kinds of interest groups) helped the study to attend to the documents that were generated by different policy actors with their own consideration, rationalisation and interpretation. The media report was also scrutinised in this study due to its capacity to record conflicts, arguments, and concrete examples that might be omitted or ignored in formal policy texts.

Table 3: Sources of document for exploring the evolution of the policy

Category	Target	Sources
Governmental sections	Ministry of Education	1. Regulations and legislation 2. Circulars and meeting records 3. Records of public complaints 4. Records of inspection and evaluation 5. Official statistics
	Two Local Educational Authorities	1. Local regulations 2. Supervision records 3. Public appeal records
	Central and local legislative institutions	1. Interrogation records
Schools	Two junior high schools (Other school level related information was collected from governmental sections or interest groups)	1. School policy documents 2. Meeting records 3. Filed complaints 4. Relevant documents provided by schools
Interest Groups	Teachers Association Parents Associations Educational NGOs	1. Public announcements 2. Records of actions 3. Relevant documents provided
Media	Three major news sources	1. The regard/opinion of media reports to the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy
Other documents		1. Governmental documents regarding the main educational ideologies in different periods 2. Research, official data, and governmental records that related to the embedded social, political and economic structures

3.3.2.1 Governmental documents

The first category of documents is governmental documents. They were collected from central and local educational authorities through websites, public records, and also through participants in this research. These governmental policy texts were examined to understand the intentions and actions of governmental institutions in the long process of the policy. In the searching process, not only documents that are related to the mixed-ability grouping policy, but also documents that are related to the development of the Taiwanese education system were collected.

The revisions of the policy in this 30-year period were paid special attention to in my documentary analysis. In the central level, I gathered the relevant regulations, legislation, inspection reports and official statements published in Ministry of Education Bulletins. I

also went through the MOE Educational Statistic Database to gather the pertinent statistics, which included the average senior high school entry rates of pupils in the past ten years, the available statistics of the mixed-ability grouping policy implementation rates, and ratio between the numbers of academic and vocational senior high schools in the past thirty years, the average class size of junior high school class in the past thirty years, and the general information about academic and vocational senior high schools. Further, while interviewing the MOE informants, I asked them to provide meeting records, internal circulars, complaints filed by different sources, and written inspection procedures. In the local level, I collected local regulations that corresponded to the mixed-ability grouping policy, and also asked informants to provide relevant meeting records, internal circulars, complaints filed the public, and the written inspection procedures. Several complementary regulations were identified by local educational authorities as being applicable to the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy, such as the ‘Regulations of Within-School Pupil Transference’. These regulations were also collected if the local educational authorities interviewed issued such regulations.

3.3.2.2 Documents gathered from schools

School documents are the second category of documentary evidence collected. I intended to gather relevant documents about the current practice and the history of grouping practice in the researched schools. The procedures of grouping practice adopted in the schools were provided by both of the case-studied schools. I obtained the school history records that contained information about school grouping practice in the past from only one school. Other than governmental circulars, both of the schools stated that relevant documents, such as the records of the decision-making process were scattered so they could not provide them all to me.

3.3.2.3 Documents gathered from interest groups

The next documentary source is interest groups. During the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy, interest groups including teachers' associations, parents' associations and civil educational reform groups have established complicated relationships with educational authorities, schools, and with one another. Interest groups thus became an important source for this study and it is imperative to explore the negotiations, conflicts and compromises among different stakeholders within the policy process. Most of the documents which recorded their activities, announcements, the complaints they received, the negotiation processes with schools and educational authorities, and the obtained responses are safely retained by these interest groups in their electronic newsletters and internal files. Other than contacting some groups to ask for their internal files, I also went through the newsletters published by influential interest groups, which included three teachers' associations (National Teachers' Association and two local teachers' associations), two national parents' associations (National Parents' Association and National Compulsory Education Parents' Association), and also one active civil educational reform group (Humanistic Education Foundation) to collect documents.

3.3.2.4 Documents gathered from media reports

The fourth category of document is the media report. It can be found that during the long process, many policy actors utilised the media as an arena to attract public attention and to impose pressure on educational authorities. For instance, scholars and interest groups utilised the media to address their concerns towards the policy, educational authorities made use of the media to promote their decisions, and recently, parents and pupils reported schools' grouping practice to the media rather than to the educational authorities in the hope of invoking public concern. The media in Taiwan have also actively investigated the

practice of the policy in order to better present this controversial issue to the public. Their interviews with school educators all over the country usually provided readers with more concrete examples of the policy practice in schools than the official reports published by the educational authorities. Therefore, I treated media reports as an important source for tracing the development and the conflicts over the mixed-ability grouping policy. In this study, I searched both the electronic databases and paper archives of the three major newspapers—United Daily News, China Times and Liberty Times in Taiwan to collect appropriate information. United Daily News has the most extensive news about the mixed-ability grouping policy. Currently there are many small on-line news sources available; these news sources were also used if the content was pertinent to this study.

3.3.2.5 Academic research

Previous research studies were also collected in this study. I used the terms ‘mixed-ability grouping policy’, ‘streaming’, ‘ability grouping’, and ‘grouping practice’ to search research studies through the Taiwan National Academic Journal Database and the Database of Master and Doctoral theses in Taiwan. Since the research studies were conducted in different periods of the mixed-ability grouping policy which captured the snapshots of the policy process at different times, their results and arguments served as important data for me to achieve a fuller understanding of the long policy process.

To sum up, with the recognition that documents are produced by different policy actors with their own ideologies and intentions (Goodson, 1985; McCulloch, 2004), this study tried as thoroughly as possible to collect documents from different sources, different policy actors and different perspectives over time. Nevertheless, it was also aware that there were always things left out in documents or left unsaid by policy actors (Codd, 1988; Duke, 2002). For example, I found more resisting arguments in media reports than in governmental

documents, and I found the media reports tended to emphasise conflicts while the governmental documents focused on consensus and expectation. This awareness helped me to be cautious about the sources and the functions of the information. Specifying sources in my arguments was often adopted in the findings in order to provide readers with a clearer understanding about the conflicts between diverse policy actors.

3.3.3. Pilot survey and interviews

Before starting the case studies, pilot surveys and interviews were conducted with two principals and two teachers from another county to make sure the questions designed were answerable and valid within its context. I asked the two principals to fill out the questionnaire survey and interviewed the principals and teachers about the mixed-ability grouping policy practice in schools. In the pilot study, one of the principals told me that he had difficulty to fully answer some questions, such as the questions about the different grouping methods used by schools; but they agreed that the questions asked in the survey were the key issues that were discussed in schools. The interview questions were also refined with the responses provided by principals and teachers. I found that using a detailed, concrete description to ask questions could obtain more concrete responses. For example, when asked about teaching in classrooms I needed to ask teachers to introduce the exact activities they applied in classroom so that I could understand their abstract comments on teaching in mixed-ability groups. In addition, during the pilot interviews I also learned that the director of teaching affairs was usually the key person in the schools who is in charge of the execution and the conflicts over the mixed-ability grouping policy. Therefore in the official interviews I spent more time in interviewing the directors of teaching affairs in the researched schools.

3.3.4. A questionnaire survey of school principals

A questionnaire survey of junior high school principals was employed in this study to identify the ‘problems’, which are usually patterns, trends, or situations that were perceived of in the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy (Gorard & Taylor, 2004). The results of the questionnaire survey served as an important source to understand the general practice of schools in the two selected counties, and to refine case study interview questions. Further, I paralleled the survey results with the arguments generated from documentary analysis and interviews for ‘methodology triangulation’, which is a technique for obtaining an increased credence of interpretation (Silverman, 2005; Stake, 1995). For example, my interviewees in schools constantly referred to the practice of other schools within the same county, or using phrases such as ‘all schools face the same problems...’; the survey results thus provided me with important information to examine these statements.

From the initial documentary study, it was clear that in almost every local educational authority there had been certain degrees of conflicts and resistance. However, due to the limited resources (time, funding and labour), this study chose three out of 23 local educational authorities in Taiwan to conduct a questionnaire survey in order to gain principals’ opinions and attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy. Purposive sampling was utilised for selecting three local educational authorities. Through examining official evaluations and media reports, the three local educational authorities that were found to have more conflicts over and show strong resistance to the mixed-ability grouping policy were chosen for the questionnaire survey.

The questionnaires were sent to all junior high schools in the three target local educational authorities. Aiming at surveying junior high school principals, who are identified by scholars as the key administrative figures in the reform process in schools (e.g.

Fullan, 2001), the questionnaire questions focused on extracting the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy in the schools and principals' perceptions of the often alleged barriers of policy implementation, including the disparity of pupil ability, the difficulty in teaching, the pressure from parents and the pressure of the senior high school entry examination (see questionnaire in Appendix).

In the three targeted local educational authorities, there are a total of 132 junior high schools. At the beginning of August 2007, the questionnaires in addition to the introduction letters were sent to all principals in the three local educational authorities by post. Telephone calls to the schools were made after one week to confirm they had been received. After one month, I sent the questionnaires out again to those who hadn't responded⁴. I waited until the beginning of October 2007, and then stopped the collection process. Out of the 132 surveyed junior high schools, 66 principals responded to the survey, which is a 50% total response rate. Separately, the response rate in Sunrise County⁵ was 57.1%, 63.4% in Middle Line County, and 30% in Greenheart County. The data obtained from Greenheart County was thus excluded from further analysis due to its lower response rate.

The responses from Sunrise County and Middle Line County were analysed using SPSS for frequency and crosstabulation. I also used these results to contextualise the later case studies and to refine the questions asked in the interviews with the officers in local educational authorities and the officers in the MOE.

3.3.5. Instrumental case studies of two schools

The case studies of the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy in schools in the surveyed counties were conducted after the completion of the questionnaire survey. The

⁴ The questionnaire asked the principals to identify their schools (but promised anonymity) for the purpose of selecting the possible case study schools. I recorded those who sent the questionnaire back and sent the questionnaire to others again.

⁵ The names of the counties are pseudonyms assigned by this study

policy practice of schools was examined as cases because policy practice is bounded in individual schools which have their own situation and ecology that lead to specific decisions (Stake, 1995). Further, because the case studies were conducted for the purpose of exploring the specific issue—the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy—in schools, the type of the case studies is located in the domain of ‘instrumental case study’, within which a case is studied in order to gain information about particular questions (Stake, 1995).

In order to maximise what I can learn from the cases about the conflicts over the practice of the policy, in each of the two counties where the local educational authority has resisted the mixed-ability grouping policy the most—Sunrise County and Middle Line County, which were also the sites for the principal questionnaire survey, one school from each county was chosen for case study. It was assumed that the attitudes and actions of local educational authorities significantly influence the general attitudes and actions of schools. The details of the case studies are presented as follows, and the approach to analysis will be presented in section 3.4.

3.3.5.1 Research subjects

The research strategies adopted in the case studies include documentary analysis of school level documents and interviews with school principals, the director of teaching affairs and teachers, who have different positions within the practice of the policy.

The role of the principal in school reforms and educational change has been discussed extensively (Fullan, 2001). Fullan (2001) indicated that principals stand in a pivotal place where changes may start or stagnate. Further, it was also found that the principals utilised their power to communicate, negotiate, integrate, or directly impose arguments and ideas in schools’ grouping practice (Ball, 1981; Loveless, 1999; Wells & Serna, 1996). In Taiwan, after the mixed-ability grouping policy was enforced through law in 2004, school principals

are now subjected to a sanction if the practice of the policy in school is found to be flawed. However, there is some evidence that principals also have their own educational ideologies and situational judgments which influence their actions. In my previous work experience, I have known principals who tried hard to implement mixed-ability grouping in schools but they encountered obstacles from both teachers and parents; I have also known teachers who complained that principals streamed pupils secretly. Either way, the principal is a key figure that plays an important role in the practice of the policy.

In addition, the director of teaching affairs, who is the leading administrator of all the teaching affairs within a school in the Taiwanese context, was another important interviewee in this study. Due to the minor role played by subject-related departments in Taiwanese schools, most of the issues regarding teaching and learning are handled by the Department of Teaching Affairs, which is a school-wide department. Although the role of the director of teaching affairs was overlooked in the existing research of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan, I was advised by the piloted principals that the director of teaching affairs was the one who coordinates disagreements regarding the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy. The directors of teaching affairs in the two studied schools were thus invited to be interviewed, and I found during the process that they were probably the most important key informants within the practice of the policy in schools because they were the ones who were responsible for the overall academic performance of the pupils; therefore the questions regarding grouping practice and pupils' attainments was often raised by teachers and parents to the directors of teaching affairs.

Teachers were the third interview targets in the case studies. In the research about the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy conducted in the US and the UK (Ball, 1981; Ireson & Hallam, 2001; Lookwood, 1996; Loveless, 1999), it is clear that the conflicts among teachers in schools influence the practice of mixed-ability grouping. For

example, teachers who teach different subject areas may have different perceptions towards using mixed-ability grouping, which influences their grouping decision in subject departments; further, teachers who have different beliefs towards learning and social equality may also have different positions while discussing the policy inside schools (Ireson & Hallam, 2001; Ball, 1981). Though there is research in Taiwan regarding teachers' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy (C-H. Chang & S-Y. Kuo, 1984; Feng, 1996), these findings were separated from the policy practice in schools. Little is known about how teachers' attitudes and actions influence the decision-making process and the actual practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan.

In this study, teachers who teach five different subjects (math, English, Mandarin, science, and social study), who may have different perceptions towards pupils' abilities and mixed-ability teaching based on the logic of knowledge, were interviewed in this study. These five subjects are the subjects tested in the senior high school entry examination and this study attempted to learn how the teachers who teach these 'tested' subjects perceive the policy and the influence of the senior high school entry system. Due to the limited time and labour, I interviewed five teachers who taught the five subjects in each school to explore their understandings of school practice and their own values and arguments towards the mixed-ability grouping policy. I was initially concerned that more interviewees should be recruited in order to gain better information about school practices; but after the completion of several interviews, I found their descriptions of school practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy and the negotiation process were not much different even where they had different opinions towards the policy and school practice. Further, the quality time I spent with the teachers gave me new insights into the issues that were constantly argued about, which helped me to develop in-depth analysis of the issues related to this study.

3.3.5.2 Research questions

With the main objective of understanding the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy, the issues covered in interviews include (see appendix for interview questions):

1. The current practice of the schools;
2. The negotiation process the school experienced;
3. The conflicts emerging;
4. Personal perceptions of relevant educational issues;
6. Personal arguments about the barriers alleged to hinder the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy including the disparity of pupil ability, the difficulty of teaching and the influence of the senior high school entry system.

During the interview, other than focusing on my interview questions, I also collected information about the interviewees' background including their professional training, their teaching experience, and if they had taught in schools with a different kind of grouping practice. Through the interviews it was found that the interviewees themselves view their training and teaching experience as important factors that influenced their attitude towards the mixed-ability grouping policy.

3.3.5.3 The type of interview

Interviews were utilised in this research in the case studies and in approaching officers in the local educational authorities and the MOE. As indicated by scholars, interview is a strategy that gives the researcher access to the 'meaning' levels (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 2006), and to the 'representation or accounts' of individuals' interpretations or views (Silverman, 2006). Interviews can also be combined with questionnaire surveys as a follow-up to explore survey responses or established cases (Gorard & Taylor, 2004; Yin, 2003). In this study, interviews were adopted to understand stakeholders' perceptions,

arguments, and rationales of the different elements of the policy. The type of interview I conducted in this study was located within the domain of semi-structured interview. The interview questions were planned ahead to form the basic direction of the discussion, but asked without a strict sequence (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The questions were open-ended and exploratory; personal experiences and stories that helped explain stakeholders' construction of the policy were welcomed. Further, to probe this contentious policy, I constantly asked the interviewees to provide examples, if there were any, to clarify their arguments; and if interviewees were aware of counter arguments, which often turned out to be the case, I asked them to make their own comparisons of contradictory arguments to explain why they supported specific standpoints or why they had conflicted attitudes towards the same issue. During every interview, notes and digital recordings were taken with the interviewees' consent. The contents of the interviews were partially transcribed through a manual procedure.

3.3.5.4 The execution of the case study

The invitation to participate in the case study was initially sent with the questionnaire survey to all surveyed schools in the two studied counties. In Sunrise County, eight out of the total 49 junior high schools in the county expressed a willingness to be interviewed. I picked out schools at random from these eight schools and Pinewood junior high, which was the second school I contacted in Sunrise County, was willing to arrange interviews with teachers and administrators for me. The research plan I proposed to Pinewood junior high included in-depth interviews with the principal, the director of teaching affairs, and five teachers of the five main subjects, and collection of relevant documents. According to the teachers, they were asked by the director of teaching affairs in staff meetings and participated in the interview voluntarily. In November and December 2007, I visited

Pinewood junior high six times within three weeks to interview the participants. Most of the interviews were between two and three hours long. The interview with the principal lasted for 3.5 hours.

In Middle Line County, only five out of the 41 junior high schools showed an interest in being interviewed further. Failing to recruit enough interviewees in the first school, where interviews with the principal and the director of teaching affairs had already been completed, North Creek junior high school was the second school I contacted. I interviewed the principal, the director of teaching affairs, and five teachers of the five main subjects in the school. The teachers I interviewed were asked by the director of teaching affairs in their personal office rather than in a school-wide staff meeting. It meant that not all teachers had the chance to express their willingness to be interviewed. After contacting the principal and the director of teaching affairs via telephone and email several times, I visited the school three times in April and May 2008 and interviewed all the participants and collected documents. The interviews were also between two to three hours long. I interviewed both the principal and the director of teaching affairs twice in this school to collect further information and to clarify certain vague messages.

I was aware that the schools that hadn't agreed to this interview invitation had their own reasons for making such a decision. The topic, which is a sensitive issue, and the extra time and effort that the school educators were willing to spend, may have influenced their response to the research. In this study, the reasons why the schools and the educators were willing to be interviewed were explored as part of the information to understand the educators' attitudes towards the conflicts over the mixed-ability grouping policy and the school practice.

In both of the schools that were researched, 'gate keeping' issues were encountered in the research process. Two issues are discussed due to their influence on the data obtained.

One is the relationship established between the 'gatekeeper' and researcher, and the other is access controlled by the gatekeepers.

To build a rapport with the gatekeepers in the two schools—the directors of teaching affairs who were the ones helping me arrange the teacher interviewees, a complete set of documents which included the introduction of the research, the research questions, and the consent form were sent at the beginning, accompanied by several phone calls for answering subsequent questions. I also negotiated with the directors of teaching affairs about the methods that could be adopted to recruit teachers as interviewees. As mentioned above, the teachers at Pinewood junior high were recruited through school-wide staff meetings, but the teachers at North Creek were recruited by the director of teaching affairs through individual invitation in a much more casual manner. In the latter case, the gatekeeper held more control over my access to teacher participants, which not only limited the sampling pool of this study, but also increased the possible bias of selection that the director of teaching might select the participants based on his own preference.

Nonetheless, either way participants' preferences and motives for being interviewed, and their relationship with the school administrators are relevant to their understanding and interpretations of school practice. Hence, every teacher interviewee was asked about the way they were approached to accept the interview, and every interviewee, including the principal and the director of teaching affairs were asked about their motives for participating in the research. I also asked the teacher interviewees to provide their own perceptions of other teachers' attitudes and opinions in the schools. The information related to concrete practices such as the procedure of pupil grouping provided by all interviewees in each school was later compared with one another to ensure acceptable credibility⁶.

⁶ The grouping practice adopted in junior high school in Taiwan is a sensitive topic due to that many schools were accused of using different 'disguised forms' to group higher attaining pupils.

3.3.6. Interviewing officers in two local educational authorities

After conducting the questionnaire survey and school case studies, I contacted the officers in charge of the mixed-ability grouping policy in the two researched local educational authorities where the questionnaire survey and the case studies were conducted for in-depth interviews.

The importance of local educational authority lies in their direct authority over junior high schools within individual counties, especially after the 1999 devolution of authority over compulsory education (primary and junior high schools) from the MOE to local educational authorities. The devolution has resulted in at least two changes. First, a local educational authority has to formulate its own regulations according to central policy or educational law about compulsory education; and second, the power of utilising direct sanction and reward on junior high schools is now controlled by the local educational authority whilst the MOE only holds the power of supervising the local educational authority and a limited authority to sanction and reward the local educational authorities and the schools. It is hence important to explore the different constructions and actions of local educational authorities in order to thoroughly understand the relationships between key policy actors of the mixed-ability grouping policy.

From the information provided by school administrators and local educational authority websites, I identified the key informants in the two local educational authorities—Miss Hung in Sunrise County and Mr. Chen in Middle Line County.⁷ It is found that in the two case study local educational authorities, the mixed-ability grouping policy is listed as an important task that requires intensive administrative attention, and the officers in charge of the practice of the policy need to handle affairs including the

⁷ The names of the officers in the local educational authority are also pseudonyms.

supervision of school grouping procedures, routine inspection, and also investigation of the mal-practice complaints.

The interview invitation was sent to them both in May 2008 via emails and telephone calls. Then I interviewed both Miss Hung and Mr. Chen in June 2008. The issues covered in the interviews included:

1. The reactions of the local educational authority to the mixed-ability grouping legislation;
2. The current practice of the schools in the county;
3. The difficulty of implementing the policy;
4. The negotiation process with parents and the schools;
5. The conflicts shown in the schools within the local educational authority;
6. The function of the 'mixed-ability grouping supervision committee';
7. The power relationships between the central educational authority, the local educational authority and schools.

Both of the interviews lasted about three hours, and both of the informants provided detailed responses to my questions which focused on the functions of the local educational authorities in the practice of the policy and the conflicts and struggles faced by them. Documents including local level regulations, procedures of evaluation practice, and anonymous complaints were collected from the two informants.

3.3.7. Interviewing educational officers in the Ministry of Education

After the mixed-ability grouping policy started to be enforced through law from 2004, the mixed-ability grouping policy gained its legal status which was viewed by the proponents as a crucial change that may facilitate policy implementation (H-M. Lin, 2004). Although according to the legislation, the direct authority of supervision and inspection of

school practice are controlled by local educational authorities, the MOE holds the highest authority over the policy due to its legal status.

However, whether the actions taken by the MOE to supervise the policy implementation is effective has been questioned by the proponents of the mixed-ability grouping policy (HEF, 2002, 2003a, 2008, 2009). Conversely, there were also arguments questioning the pertinence of endowing the MOE with the highest level of authority to supervise the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy (Y-P. Chuang, 2006). It can be seen that during the process of the policy, the role of the MOE is important and also contentious

In order to explore the practice of the MOE in-depth, I decided to interview the officers who actually deal with the complicated and detailed practice of the policy, instead of the ones that are in power (for example, the Minister of the MOE). Combining the information I obtained from the MOE official websites and my informants in local educational authorities, I decided to interview the chief officer and the officer in charge of the mixed-ability grouping policy in the fourth section of the Department of Compulsory Education in the MOE. The issues covered in the interviews included:

1. The rationale of the mixed-ability grouping policy and the reason to turn the policy into legislation;
2. The main responsibility of the MOE in this policy;
3. The implementation plan of the MOE;
4. The power relationships between the central educational authority, the local educational authorities and the schools;
5. Their understandings and the reactions towards the practice of the policy in schools;
6. Their attitudes and reactions towards the conflicts and the resistance

The interview invitation was sent out in May 2008 by email. My personal information,

the purpose of this study, the planned interview questions, the estimated interview time, and a consent form were included in the invitation package. Several telephone calls were made to arrange the interview after the email. From the outset the officer in charge of the mixed-ability grouping policy was reluctant to accept the invitation due to a busy schedule. After further explanation through phone calls and emails and the provision of time flexibility, I had the opportunity to interview both the officer in charge of the policy, Miss Ju-Chen Huang, and her director, the director of the fourth section of the Department of Compulsory Education, Miss Hsiao-Hsia Wu, together at the end of July in 2008 in the office building of the MOE.

I later found that it was very useful to interview both the officer in charge of the policy and the director of the section. During the interview, the officer in charge provided many concrete examples of how she handled different complaints and conducted evaluations, and the director possessed the background knowledge about the policy design and the evaluation procedure.

Moreover, because the interview was conducted after the interviews with schools and the officers in the local educational authorities, I had many local responses as contextual information to interview the MOE. For instance, I had more concrete examples to describe the ‘difficulty’ faced by schools. I also developed detailed questions regarding the evaluation of the practice from the opinions I previously obtained from the school principals and the officers in the local educational authorities.

The officers also provided many documents for analysis at the time of the interview. They provided the internal circulars regarding the policy implementation, recent complaints made by the public, and recent evaluation reports. Additional documents such as the regulations about the evaluation procedure were also provided by email at a later date.

3.4. Data analysis

In this part, I first present the general procedure I followed to analyse the obtained data; then I illustrate the criteria for winnowing the data extracted from different sources in order to explore different aspects of the research.

3.4.1. General analysis procedures

As demonstrated above, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in this study. The quantitative data collected from the questionnaire survey of school principals were organised and analysed through SPSS software for generating frequency and crosstabulation. The qualitative data, which was drawn from documents and interviews, was analysed followed the analysis procedure proposed by Miles and Huberman, which contains three components: data reduction, data display, drawing and verifying conclusions (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

This section explains the general procedure I applied in analysing my data, and the following few sections will introduce the directions of codes and themes identifying, which were developed for the purpose of answering my questions.

The first step of analysing qualitative data in the framework proposed by Miles and Huberman is reducing them (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In this study, I perceived 'data reduction' as a process during which meaningful codes are identified, categories are formed and themes emerged are detected. I firstly read the documents and the data I had partially transcribed from my digital recording of interviews line by line in order to identify meaningful words, phrases and sentences. All data were read repeatedly and examined within the statement contexts until I had the confidence to label them with specific codes, or 'units of meaning' (Wellington, 2006). Due to the different characteristics of my research questions, as some are exploratory questions and some are target specific, I attended to

themes that emerged naturally which helped the understanding of the policy process, and also paid attention to the data that were related to the arguments used to debate the mixed-ability grouping policy.

Next, I identified the connections among the codes in order to develop the themes that might help answer my research questions. This is a step for seeking patterns and regularity as well as ‘contrasts, paradoxes and irregularities (Wellington, 2006, p136). For example, when I found the patterns emerged from several identified codes regarding the way policy texts referred to the implementation of the policy or regarding educators’ perceptions of pupils’ ability, I recorded the emerged themes and noted the rationales for developing these themes. After identifying the themes, I re-checked them to see if the themes covered the relevant codes, or whether other themes that might better represent the main ideas of certain codes should be developed. Here, the quantity of similar codes, which unfolds the significance of the meanings, was one of the criteria for me to develop reliable themes for analysis (Seidman, 2006).

The next step conducted was ‘data display’. After developing several themes, I displayed them in a notebook to explore the relationships between the themes and the relationships between the themes and my research questions. For example, there were several meaningful themes regarding the changes of the interpretations of the policy objectives and these themes could be paralleled with the changes of the mainstream educational ideologies that were influenced by the wider political and social contexts. I also read these themes and examined the possible relationships that I established repeatedly in order to develop the coherent arguments that might help me to answer my research questions. This technique then led to the next step of the analysis framework—drawing and verifying conclusions. Here, I developed interpretations of the themes with reference to the contexts within which the themes emerged. Tentative interpretations were reconsidered

through revisiting data collected from different sources. This technique was constantly utilised to examine the suitability of the interpretation in the hope of establishing the ‘appropriate and adequate warrants’ of my arguments and conclusions (Phillips & Burbules, 2000).

3.4.2. The direction of data analysis

The direction of analysis was guided by the Hodgson and Spours’ analytical framework. I conducted the analysis with the attempt to explore the relationships between the wider contexts and the policy cycle of the policy, the characteristics of the policy cycle of the mixed-ability grouping policy, and the relationships between the wider contexts and the contested issues in the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy. With these theoretical assumptions in mind, I dived into my data with an open yet cautious mind to search for emerging themes to properly and solidly answer my research questions.

Further, I was aware of that the data I obtained from documents and interview responses were generated within specific time-frames and contexts where specific discourses might dominate the thoughts and the arguments (Gee, 1999). This recognition of ‘discourse’, which is often emphasised by scholars who utilise the discourse analysis methods (Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 1999), facilitated the analysis of data in this study especially when this study was aiming at understanding arguments and process within their wider contexts.

It should be noted there that whilst the analysis of the data was guided by the Hodgson and Spours’ framework, during the analysis process I kept my mind open with the possibility that the framework might not be adequate to explain the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan, and that the framework might need to be extended in order to better understand an educational policy in Taiwanese contexts.

3.4.2.1 Understanding the context

Searching for contexts in this study was identified as understanding the political, economic, and educational contexts of the policy. It was also a search to understand the ‘political eras’ and ‘the education state’ of the research framework in this study.

As mentioned in the previous section, governmental documents and existing academic research were collected for this research purpose. In governmental documents, the important transitions of Taiwanese political and economic environments which were revealed from relevant legislations and policies and the educational ideologies repetitively emphasised in different kinds of official announcements were identified and coded. Further, the contents, the rationales, and the characteristics of major educational policies, including the centralised curriculum, the designation of a centrally controlled administrative system, and the establishment of the senior high school entry system, were identified.

I also utilised academic research to learn about the arguments about the political, economic, social and educational structures in Taiwan for the purpose of examining and enriching my own constructions of the wider contexts of the policy.

3.4.2.2 Exploring the evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy

The exploration of the evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy was guided by the conceptual framework of the policy cycle, and then discussed within the analysis of the wider contexts.

By examining the documents, I identified the emerging main activities and themes in the process of the policy to map out the ‘policy cycle’ of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan. The influential factors, arguments, and the channels the arguments delivered were coded as the meaningful events in the context of influence. The main policy actors, the key points of the policy texts, and how the policy texts establish the rationales of the policy

were identified in the exploration of the context of policy text. Finally, the actions of policy actors in different positions and the arguments generated from practice revealed from documents, the questionnaire and my interviews were analysed and categorised in the contexts of practice. The interviewees' understandings of the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy and their perceptions of related issues, including the obstacles to implementation and their own interpretation of teaching and pupils' learning, were read several times to identify the emerging patterns and themes. Further, through simultaneously examining policy texts and policy actors' 'reading' of and 'reactions' to the texts, the influences and also the limitations of policy texts in the practice of the policy were revealed.

It was also recognised that the policy cycle is identified as a continuous process in which different contexts interrelate with one another. Therefore, I paid attention to whether there was a nexus that connects the different contexts across the long process. For example, it was frequently found that the arguments generated in the context of practice became major influences in the contexts of influence and the context of policy text production, and the policy texts would be revised accordingly but also generated new discussions that either influenced the policy practice or constituted further influences.

Finally, the power structure among policy actors and the influence of the structure on policy practice were also analysis focuses. As indicated above, the interviewees in this study were selected from different positions in the process of the policy; therefore, the positional power, the situational interests, and the relationships between policy actors who were in different positions were taken into consideration.

3.5. Validity

Validity of research, which is identified as the extent of 'accuracy' the research could achieve while representing, describing and also interpreting social phenomena is crucial to

social science research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Stake, 1995). Though in different research paradigms, the views towards 'reality' and the manners employed to approach social phenomenon are varied, it is agreed that the researcher should put effort into ensuring the credibility of the data source and the interpretation generated from various analytical strategies (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In this study, data source triangulation and methodological triangulation were the main strategies utilised to ensure the validity of the data source and interpretation.

Data source triangulation was adopted to learn about the consistency of participants' opinions or actions (Stake, 1995). For example, in understanding the practice of the mixed-ability grouping in schools, and the pressure faced by schools, different interviewees' responses were triangulated to ensure the credibility of the claims.

Methodological triangulation was used to increase my confidence in making assertions and interpreting my data (Silverman, 2006; Stake, 1995). The triangulation of documentary analysis, the questionnaire survey, and the data obtained from semi-structured interviews and case studies enhanced the credibility of the findings obtained from individual research strategies and further validated my interpretation based on the data.

I was also aware that the values of the researcher would inevitably influence the process of data collection and interpretation. Particularly in qualitative research, the interaction between researcher and participant is 'presumed unique and not necessarily reproducible for other cases and researchers' (Stake, 1995, p135). However, as a researcher who holds my own attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy, it is important to avoid any unnecessary impressions that would influence a participant's response, which may affect the credibility of the research. Therefore, in the interview contexts, I exposed myself as a researcher who was aware of the conflicts over the issue and also appreciated and respected any perspectives from interviewees. Moreover, with a semi-structured style,

the interviews were conducted in a dynamic power relationship within which participants were encouraged to articulate their responses and were free to choose the questions they wanted to answer. Participants were also able to discuss any of their concerns that weren't mentioned in the original research questions, and had the opportunity to remind the researchers of the arguments they wanted to keep confidential.

The same self-awareness was applied during the process of data analysis. Other than adopting methodological triangulation to ensure the credibility of findings and interpretation, I also tried to immerse myself in data to be near to the interviewee's original logic in order to approach the acceptable accuracy of interpretation.

3.6. The Role of Researcher: Reflexivity

Schwandt (1997) asserts that reflexivity is an 'acknowledgment' of the researcher's own preconceptions, preference, values, and position, and a 'process' that researchers critically reflects on the possible influence of their personal characteristics on the construction of meanings throughout the research process. In any research, the researchers' preference is involved with the choice of topic and the choice of research approach. It is also the same in the process of research, personal influence is unavoidable in the interaction between the researcher and the subjects and in the researcher's interpretation of data. Moreover, in qualitative research, which puts emphasis on approaching human subjects to gain deep meanings, mutual construction by participants and the researcher is natural and unavoidable. Reflexivity is thus crucial to reveal these possible influences.

Other than retaining the 'acknowledgment' in the research process, it is suggested that providing a reflexivity report on the researcher's personal perspectives would help both the researcher and the reader to understand the research with prudent caution (Silverman, 2006). This section thus presents the reflexivity report.

First, the choice of topic was rooted in my concerns of the ‘abnormal’ junior high school education in Taiwan. It has long been argued that the junior high school is the most painful learning stages for pupils in Taiwan due to its utilisation of not only within-school streaming, but also other many anti-educational actions (C-W. Wang, & W-Y. Lin, 1994). Further, my own experience gave me a presumption that although the saying ‘teaching in accordance with pupils’ abilities’ is constantly adopted to support streaming, the expectations and the resources invested in pupils in the stratified classes are not equal. From my perspective, both the equity and quality of education are infringed under the circumstances. Nonetheless, the mixed-ability grouping policy, which aims to challenge the adoption of streaming in school, is in constant and long-term conflict as described in the introductory section. For me, it is an interesting dilemma that requires thorough investigation, and the idea of ‘understanding the dilemma’ influences the approach and questions adopted in this study. I was aware of my own predispositions during the research process, especially when I was conducting the interviews. As previously mentioned, I did not articulate my own views when participants invited me to discuss specific issues in order to avoid the possibility that interviewees might answer the questions with supposition. I also emphasised that I was aware of the conflicts within the policy and that it is in the interests of the study to learn about perceptions and experiences from different perspectives.

Second, my previous work experience as a policy analyst and journal reporter in an active civil education reform group was likely to impact on my understanding of the policy actors in the education system. The disadvantage may be that I was not an ‘insider’ who could fully appreciate the specific cultures within schools and administrative institutions, and I may still position myself as an activist in civil educational reform groups. However, I may be able to depart from the ‘common sense’ held by policy actors within the official education system and capture the detailed meanings delivered by every interviewee.

Therefore, I spent lots of time with interviewees reconfirming their arguments and their interpretations.

Chapter 4 : The evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy—transformed contexts, process, and contested issues

As demonstrated in chapter 3, this study attempts to utilise different research methods to approach the evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan. In this chapter, the evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy is explored by investigating a broad range of policy texts, which includes formal policy texts (regulations, legislation, official announcements, etc.), relevant factual data (statistics, official reports, etc.), media reports and materials that are significant and influential in the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy. The exploration in this chapter pays close attention to the contradictory arguments and the occurrence of conflicts and negotiations in order to understand the contested policy process as thoroughly as possible. The analytical framework developed by Hodgson and Spours (2006) is explicitly adopted to trace the influence of the wider contexts and the power relationships between different policy actors on the contested process of the mixed-ability grouping policy. In the rest of this chapter, the exploration of the evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy will be presented based on the adopted analytical framework. The two different political regimes, which are argued in this study as constructing two different political eras and the corresponding education states will be presented, the conflicted and also cyclical policy process will be depicted, and the influence of the wider contexts (political, economic and societal environments) and the interplay between policy actors on the evolution of the contested key issues in the policy process will be discussed. The discussion about political space within the policy process, which is the fourth analytical tool identified in the Hodgson and Spours Framework, will be presented firstly in the sections that explore the education states and policy cycles in the two political

eras. This is because the manifestations of political space are inseparable from the characteristics of the education states and the policy process. In section 4.3, a more comprehensive analysis of the political space within the long mixed-ability grouping policy process will be presented, and the issues it raises will be discussed.

4.1. The autocratic regime, the autocratic education system

4.1.1. Political era: nation-centred educational ideology

The mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan was issued in 1979 under the Nationalist Party's autocratic regime. It was a period when the Nationalist government⁸ imposed Martial Law on the island to control every aspect of society. Education was no exception. The centralised education system and the nation-centred educational ideology penetrated almost every educational policy. This autocratic regime, which existed from 1945 to 1987, is argued in this study as the first political era that contextualised the mixed-ability grouping policy.

The autocratic ruling of the Nationalist government in Taiwan was a means for nation building. After World War II, Japan surrendered its 50 year rule of Taiwan to the Nationalist government in China in 1945. On the one hand, the Nationalist government declared the sovereignty transference as Taiwan's return to the 'home country'; but on the other hand, the Nationalist government was wary of the long colonised Taiwanese society because of its unique culture and social structures (Ho, 1980; N-H. Hsu, 1993; Hu, 2005; S-C. Yeh, 1993). Under the circumstances, 'transforming the enslaved Taiwanese "back" to the Chinese' was one of the most important tasks of the Nationalist government at that time (Hu, 2005). The later overall retreat of the Nationalist government from China to Taiwan reinforced the

⁸ The Nationalist Party controlled government in the autocratic regime is generally called as the Nationalist government.

determination of the Nationalist government to control Taiwanese society. After being defeated by the Chinese Communist Party in China, the Nationalist government viewed Taiwan as the last fortress to secure its legitimacy. Thus, autocratic control was imposed in Taiwan for the purpose of stabilising society and defending the country (Martial Law, 1948; Temporary Act of the Period of Mobilization for the Suppression of Communist rebellion, 1949).

The issue of Martial Law and ‘Temporary Act of the Period of Mobilization for the Suppression of Communist Rebellion’ assured the establishment of the autocratic regime and endowed the Nationalist Party with total power over every aspect of society in Taiwan. Politically, the Nationalist government utilised Martial Law to suppress free speech, democratic elections, and the establishment of political parties. Economically, the Nationalist government led the ‘planned economy’ that controlled key market elements in society. Socially, the media, civil groups, and also people’s ordinary lives were all under the government’s surveillance. Prohibition and sanctions on speech, group gathering and collective actions opposing the government were strictly enforced during this period, and the education system, which was built on the system established by the former Japanese colonisation, was also under a ‘comprehensive control’ of the nation-centred ideology (C-T. Tsai, 2002; W-N. Wu, 2000).

Earlier research has categorised the Nationalist government’s control over education into two dimensions: control of the contents and control of the system (W-N. Wu, 2000). In order to embed patriotism, conformity, and discrimination against local cultures (Taiwanese language and Taiwanese culture) in Taiwanese society, educational content including the curriculum and textbooks was designed and produced by the centrally controlled institutions—the National Institute for Compilation and Translation—following rigid standards. The themes that penetrated education content at that time included being loyal to

the Nationalist government, appreciating Chinese culture, conforming to the authorities and opposing the Communist regime in China. Scholars indicated that the control of educational content reduced the curriculum to textbooks and turned teachers into ideology transmitters (C-T. Tsai, 2002). In terms of control over the system, the Nationalist government built up a large and centralised bureaucratic system to ensure the delivery of centralised controlled content. The establishment of schools, the training and certification of educational personnel, the appointment of educational authority officers, and the norms of schooling were all directly regulated by the central authority. A representative example is the ritualised schooling schedule. During that period, every school not only used the same textbooks and curricula, but teachers also taught in a similar way using identical teaching and assessment methods (W-Y. Lin, 1996).

A diagram developed by W-N. Wu (2000) to explain the Nationalist government's centrally controlled content and education system is presented below.

Table 4: The control over the education system before the abolition of Martial Law

	Systems	Contents
Resource distribution	1. Economic development driven. 2. Severe control on the establishment of private schools	Resources focused on taking care of 'talents' and 'elites'.
Teaching force	Trained by controlled institutions. Certified and assigned by the country.	Teachers were defined as discipline and ideology cultivators.
Education administration	1. Administrators were certified and assigned by the country 2. Locating military officers in schools	Administrators' main tasks were ideological and political management
Curriculum	Centralised and mandated textbooks	Emphasis on patriotism, conformity, unidirectional ideology and segregation between Chinese and others
Parents' involvement	Educational regulations stated that schools could choose parent representatives.	Parents were financial supporters.

Source: Wu, W-N., 2000

It was also during this period that the wave of modernisation among developing countries started to influence the Nationalist government (H-F. Liu, 2007). With the ideology that education should serve economic development, the Nationalist government identified education as a means of raising the overall quality of manpower and also a means of manpower differentiation (C-H. Chang, 1996; C-H. Chang, 2007). Compulsory education⁹ was extended from six to nine years in 1968 for the purpose of enhancing people's level of the education (Nine-year Compulsory Education Statute, 1968). The academic and vocational streams in senior high level education were designed to be based on the Nationalist government's economic plan (H-F. Liu, 2007). In the 1970s, the Council for Economic Planning and Development launched a series of manpower development plans for the purpose of advancing national industrial development. These plans proposed that the ratio between pupils in academic senior high schools and vocational senior high schools should be 3:7, and this proposed ratio later became a working target for the MOE in 1977 (H-C. Hsieh, C-F. Chang, & S-L. Huang, 1996; Executive Yuan Council for Economic Planning and Development, 1973a, 1973b; Ye & C-Y. Lin, 2008).

Scholars argued that this 'planned' streaming at senior high school level education influenced the previous level of education—the junior high level education profoundly (Y-H. Chang, C-T. Hsueh, & Y-J. Hwang, 1996). Y-H. Chang et al.(1996) argued that because the streaming at senior high school level education was closely linked to pupils' future economic and social status, the competition for entering academic high schools became fiercer than ever before. C-W. Wang and W-Y. Lin(1994) suggested that senior high level education has become a 'senior high school entry industry', within which schools adopted within school streaming, corporal punishment, and after-school cramming to 'train' pupils to

⁹ It is mandated that Taiwanese citizens between the ages of 6 and 15 should receive compulsory education. The two stages of compulsory education are primary level education and junior high level education (Compulsory Education Act).

compete in the examination. In addition, scholars also pointed out that the attention paid to manpower planning and gifted education fostered a narrowly-defined meritocracy where test scores became the sole criteria adopted to differentiate between pupils and distribute resources (C-W. Wang & W-Y. Lin, 1999, W-N. Wu, 2000; H-F. Liu, 2007).

In short, during the autocratic regime, the mainstream educational ideologies in Taiwan were solely controlled by the Nationalist government to cultivate the “Chinese characteristics” in people and to utilise education as a means to boost economic development.

4.1.2. The education state: central-control and administrative-control

The central-control ideology during the autocratic regime confined the education state in Taiwan to governmental agencies. During this period, developing a centralised education system was viewed as necessary and efficient. The central educational authority, the local educational authority and all schools of different levels were all under the strict control of the Nationalist government. Applying the concept of ‘political space’, which refers to the space opened up for policy actors to influence the policy process (Hodgson & Spours, 2006), we can see that there was little space for various policy actors to participate in educational affairs. Although there were scholars and educational professionals invited to attend the ‘Educational Development Meetings’ held by the Nationalist government from time to time, most of these meetings were pretty closed. There was no sign showing that the educational authority had an intention to invite the participation of the public or to raise public awareness.

In order to impose strict and detailed control, the central educational authorities utilised thousands of administrative orders to control educational affairs. Matters as central as the schooling system to matters as minute as the school dress code were all regulated by the

MOE, which restrained the local educational authorities and the schools from exercising autonomous governance (W-Y. Lin, 1996). Nonetheless, the interactions between governmental institutions at different levels were found to be languished rather than efficient. The description of ‘under-organisation within over-organisation’ was used by researchers to describe how a seemingly rigorous system could be so ill-functioning due to its inability to accommodate local contexts (e.g. W-Y. Lin, 1996).

This narrowly-scoped and centralised controlled education state had a profound influence on the education in Taiwan. It is argued that the education system during that period was a large bureaucratic machine within which personnel and educators were tamed into regulation followers and not only were their teaching, learning and management in the education system all unified, but the in-depth reflection of the educational profession was eliminated (W-Y. Lin, & C-W. Wang, 1996; C-W. Wang, H-Y. Lin, & H-T. Huang, 1996).

Moreover, in a later section we will also see from the analysis of the mixed-ability grouping policy that the imagination of policy implementation during this period was predominantly top-down and order-driven. Under the circumstances, the conflicts regarding practicability and ideologies during the process of educational policy tended to be suppressed, and the practice of policy, especially the contested policies, often headed in unexpected directions without being discussed or reflected upon.

The following diagrams summarise the characteristics of the political era and the corresponding education state in the autocratic regime. To sum up, during the autocratic regime, the education system in Taiwan was built under the overarching ‘nation-centred’ ideology, and the centralisation of power and the strict control over educational affairs made education a direct tool of the Nationalist government.

Table 5: The characteristics of the *political era* in the autocratic regime

<i>Underlying societal shift and historical trend</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nation building and sovereignty defence 2. The urge for modernisation and industrialisation
<i>Dominant political ideology</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Education is the means for nation building.(Morally, culturally, politically, and economically). 2. Overall Controls are imposed on personnel training, personnel certification, curricula, textbooks, resources, the behaviours of educators and pupils, and educational paths.

Table 6: The characteristics of the *education state* in the autocratic regime

<i>Scope</i>	Confined to governmental institutions
<i>Power structure</i>	Hierarchical stratification Central control Administrative control The absence of civil society
<i>Education administration</i>	Administrators' main task is ideological and political management Administrators are certified and assigned by the central authority
<i>Teacher</i>	Teachers are identified as discipline and ideology cultivators. Teachers are trained by controlled institutions, and certified and assigned by the central authority
<i>Parents involvement</i>	Schools could choose parent representatives by themselves. Parents are financial supporters rather than participants in education

4.1.3. The policy cycle in the Martial-Law period

As introduced in chapter 2, the concept of ‘policy cycle’, which is composed of three inter-related contexts—the context of influence, the context of policy text, and the context of practice—was proposed by scholars to describe the non-linear, messy and cyclical process of policy (Bowe et al., 1992; Hodgson & Spours, 2006). It is argued that these three important contexts within the policy process constantly interact with one another and it is within the interactions that the influences, the policy texts, and the practice of the policy keep evolving. In the following paragraphs, I will present the policy process of the

mixed-ability grouping policy by exploring the three key contexts. Although I discuss these three contexts separately, it is important to highlight that the key developments in one of the contexts are inevitably related to the other two contexts. In this part I focus on exploring the policy process of the mixed-ability grouping policy in the autocratic regime in Taiwan to discover the influence of the nation-centred educational ideology and the centralised education system on the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy.

After the issue of the pilot mixed-ability grouping policy in 1979, the policy was revised three times in 1982, 1983, and 1985 during the Martial Law period. The revisions of the policy are listed in the table below. We can see that the policy texts were very prescriptive that they described the procedures that schools should follow in detail. Further discussion about the style and the content of the mixed-ability grouping policy will be presented in section 4.1.3.2.

Table 7: The four versions of the mixed-ability grouping policy during the Martial Law period (1979~1987)

<p>1979: Pilot regulation (The Execution Codes of Grouping Practice for Junior High School Pupils)</p>
<p>The first grade of junior high level education should adopt mixed-ability grouping. Setting or banding can be utilised in the second and the third grade.</p> <p>In order to improve the vocational education, the third grade of junior high level education could use streaming.</p> <p>Setting should be formed within every two or three classes based on pupils' IQ scores, aptitudes, and attainments.</p> <p>Banding of pupils should be based on pupils' attainments or IQ scores. Pupils within the same band should be mixed-ability grouped.</p> <p>Ladder-like streaming is strictly prohibited.</p> <p>The teaching methods used and the teaching material adopted should be enhanced when using setting or banding.</p>
<p>1982: Administrative order (The Execution Codes of Grouping Practice for Junior High School Pupils)</p>

Revised the code: *‘In order to improve the vocational education, the third grade of junior high level education could use streaming’ into ‘In order to improve the vocational education, junior high schools can establish a vocational class in the third grade, but the establishment of a fixed ‘vocational class’ and a ‘advanced school entry class’ is not allowed’*

Add one code: The execution of mixed-ability grouping can utilise pupils’ IQ scores, physical heights, and an open lottery but not the order the pupils report to school or the distance pupils live from the school to decide pupils’ placement. An example of the execution is as follows: if the school is going to group the 280 new pupils for the first grade this year into 6 classes, pupils should be ranked from 1 to 280 first based on their IQ scores first, and then allocated by their ranks as shown as below:

Class one: 1, 12, 13, 24....

Class two: 2, 11, 14, 23....

Class three: 3, 10, 15, 22...

Class four: 4, 9, 16, 21...

Class Five: 5, 8, 17, 20...

Class Six: 6, 7, 18, 19...

1983: Administrative order

(The Execution Codes of Grouping Practice for Junior High School Pupils)

Reconfirm the above codes.

1985:Administrative order

(The Execution Codes of Grouping Practice for Junior High School Pupils)

Revised the code: *‘The first grade of junior high level education should adopt mixed-ability grouping. Setting or banding can be utilised in the second and the third grades’ into ‘All grades in senior high level education should utilise mixed-ability grouping. Setting in subjects can be utilised from the second grade, and the voluntary selected grouping can be adopted in the third grade’.*

Add one code: Junior high schools could adjust pupils’ placements in ability groups based on pupils’ progress and adjustments to the groups could be made in the middle or at the end of every semester.

*All versions of the mixed-ability grouping policy are listed in Appendix

4.1.3.1 The context of influence

The mixed-ability grouping policy was issued in 1979 as a pilot regulation, and then it became an official regulation in 1982. According to the Taiwan Provincial Council of Education’s (COE¹⁰) records, the purpose of the mixed-ability grouping policy was to

¹⁰ COE was the official unit between MOE and local educational authorities between 1945 and 1998. Other than Taipei and Kaohsiung’s educational authorities, which were municipal level units under the direct authority of

eliminate the flaws of the previous within-school pupil grouping practice (Taiwan Provincial Council of Education, 1983). The record stated:

Due to the educational problems resulting from the ladder-like pupil grouping¹¹, and the concerns expressed by officers in central government, the Ministry of Education consulted scholars and educational administrators to establish this regulation. The regulation is designed to provide equal opportunities to every child, but it still concerns the difference between pupils. (Taiwan Provincial Council of Education, 1983).

Before the mixed-ability grouping policy was issued, Taiwan extended compulsory education to junior high level education in 1968. Although the extension of compulsory education was recognised as being beneficial to pupils and the country, the sudden decision made by the autocratic leader resulted in negative influences. For example, due to the lack of qualified teachers, the newly established junior high schools were filled with untrained educators (Tsao & Liang, 2002). The MOE also pointed out that it was because of the boosted pupil intake and the unprepared teaching force that the use of streaming was viewed as necessary in junior high schools for the purpose of distinguishing pupils and facilitating teaching (MOE, 1979).

At that time, junior high schools adopted an extreme method to stream pupils. Pupils were grouped into stratified classes based on their attainments in primary schools or on their IQ test¹² results. Within a school there could be more than eight to 10 streams established with a clear attainment ranking. According to the survey conducted by the MOE in 1971, more than 95% of junior high schools streamed students into 'ladder-like' classes at that time (as cited in HEF, 2001b).

MOE, all other local county educational authorities were directly supervised by COE. COE was abolished after 1998 when the government system was reconstructed.

¹¹ Placing pupils into ranked streams based on their ranked academic performance.

¹² Without being specified in regulations, schools are allowed to choose different assessment tools. The popular IQ measurement tests include the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (Chinese edition), the Otis-Lennon School Ability Test (Chinese edition), the Raven Matrices Test (Chinese edition), and the Junior High School Ability Test (developed by Taiwanese scholars).

Nonetheless, the emerging disadvantages of using streaming in junior high schools started to be criticised. Several arguments regarding the disadvantages of streaming were pointed out by scholars and caught the attention of the MOE. In 1976, the psychologist Kuo-Shu, Yang criticised the unequal treatment among pupils in the streaming system in an academic conference, and suggested that most problems with teenagers in Taiwan were related to the streaming adopted by junior high schools (“Streaming,” 1976, p.2). This argument and successive reports in newspapers invoked the first wave of discussions about the grouping practice in junior high schools. There were some media reports interviewing educators, parents and scholars to discuss the effects of streaming between 1976 and 1979. The disadvantages of negatively influencing lower attaining pupils’ self-esteem, and the subsequent negative impacts on the development of a sound society were the main arguments.

The opinions and criticisms of educational scholars were the most powerful ‘resisting voices’ to the centralised educational policy during this period. Several educational psychologists were interviewed or quoted by major newspapers and also by educational authorities regarding the disadvantages of using streaming in schools. Whilst the MOE still praised the educational and economic advantages of differentiating pupils within junior high level education (attainment-based differentiation), the scholars’ voices provided society with an alternative view about the grouping practice.

The pilot version of the mixed-ability grouping policy was thus issued in 1979, which introduced mixed-ability grouping to the first grade in junior high schools¹³. However, as streaming was permitted in the second and the third grade of junior high level education, scholars kept paying attention to the grouping practices in junior high schools and their

¹³ The first grade in junior high school was also called as the 7th grade in nine-year compulsory education after the 2001 nine-year compulsory education curriculum reform. This thesis uses 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades to indicate these learning stages in junior high school.

effects. In 1984 and 1985, C-H. Chang and S-Y. Kuo(1984) conducted a large-scale survey interviewing school educators, parents and pupils and they argued that the prominent adoption of streaming undermined lower attaining pupils' learning and also their interests in learning. S-Y. Kuo (1985) further argued that schools only adopted streaming for the purpose of producing higher senior school entry rates. He suggested that rather than improving teaching and learning, streaming in junior high school in fact corrupted the junior high level education.

In general, scholars did not disagree that streaming created serious problems in teaching, learning and school discipline; but different approaches for dealing with the problems based on different ideologies. One strand of thoughts argued that streaming should be abolished because it would have a negative impact on both the higher attaining and lower attaining pupils' learning (C-H. Chang & S-Y. Kuo, 1984; "The Increasing Teenager Problems," 1978, p. 3; S-Y. Kuo, 1985); but the other strand suggested that schools should reinforce streaming by providing differentiated yet solid education to both pupils with academic and vocational aptitudes rather than just abandon streaming (K-K. Hwang, 1982, p. 2). These two strands of thoughts were frequently mentioned by the educators interviewed by the media, and quoted in the official policy documents (MOE, 1979; Taiwan Provincial Council of Education, 1983). Later we will see that while the former argument became one of the mainstream ideologies in the policy arena, the concept of the latter argument, which emphasised the innate differences between pupils, was embedded in the equally powerful counter argument that was used to question the promotion of mixed-ability grouping.

It is worth noting that in the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan, the media have played an important role in revealing the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy from the outset. Other than reporting the opinions of scholars, the media produced a series of stories covering the observations and the opinions of school educators,

parents, and even local councillors to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of streaming. It was clear that controversial opinions towards streaming existed. Some argued that streaming resulted in abnormal education in junior high schools while others insisted that streaming could facilitate the learning of pupils. Further, after the issue of the mixed-ability grouping policy, it was through the interviewing of first-line practitioners by the media, that the public and also the educational authorities learned that the divide between 'higher' and 'lower' attaining classes was still prominent rather than being constrained, although most schools declared they followed the regulations. These reports contributed to the discussions of the existing policy and the subsequent revisions of the policy texts.

Although studies found that school administrators, teachers and parents mostly supported streaming during this period (C-H. Chang & S-Y. Kuo, 1984), with the strong argument made by scholars and the extensive discussions presented in the media, the mixed-ability grouping policy was revised in 1985 to demand that pupils should mainly be placed in mixed-ability groups for the whole three years of junior high level education.

It can be seen that under the autocratic regime, limited political space was created by scholars and the media. They both utilised their 'professional' power to inform the government and society about the issues that should be considered. Most importantly, the main argument made by scholars about the negative influence of an unequal education on the soundness of society was in line with the nation-centred educational ideology. By appealing to the mainstream educational ideology, the pursuit of the abolition of streaming in school gained political ground.

4.1.3.2 The context of policy text

The Pilot 'Executive Codes of Grouping Practice for Junior High School Pupils' issued in 1979 is defined as the debut of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan in this study

because it already mandated all schools to follow the pilot regulation. During the autocratic regime, the regulation was further revised in 1982, 1983 and 1985. The 1982 version was the first official version of the mixed-ability grouping policy. It was similar to the pilot version because mixed-ability grouping was only introduced to the first grade in junior high school whilst streaming was still permitted in the second and third grades. The 1985 version of the mixed-ability grouping policy was the first version that prohibited streaming (but still allowed the use of setting) and it introduced mixed-ability groups to all three grades of junior high level education.

These early policy texts had their own characteristics regarding the format and contents. First, it can be found that the format of the policy texts was highly instructional. Being developed in a top-down manner by the MOE, the regulation listed not only the principles of the policy but also the detailed working procedures. For example, the policy texts were not only concerned with which grade should adopt mixed-ability grouping, they also specified the procedures for grouping pupils into different classes. This regulatory characteristic of the policy texts suggested a strong intention of 'practice control' (Taylor et al., 1997). This instructional style of the mixed-ability grouping policy also fitted with the Taiwanese scholars' observations that the MOE intended to create detailed administrative orders to regulate every aspect of education under the autocratic regime (W-Y. Lin, 1996).

In terms of the messages conveyed by the texts, although the policy demanded the adoption of mixed-ability grouping, the presumption that pupils have different abilities, which should be accommodated by different kinds of classes, penetrated the early versions of the policy. For example, the 1979 and the 1982 versions only mandated schools to adopt mixed-ability grouping in the first grade, but promoted streaming and setting in the second and the third grades. Further, although the regulations all stated that a strict divide between academic and vocational classes was prohibited, these versions all emphasised that certified

vocational classes could be established in junior high schools. The MOE highlighted that the combination of mixed-ability grouping, streaming, and setting would accommodate pupils in the schools and in their future career paths (MOE, 1982). This rationale provided by the MOE revealed the idea that pupils' career paths could and should be planned based on pupils' differentiated abilities through junior high level education. This resonated well with the dominant political ideology that education should be centrally controlled in order to facilitate the nation's economic development.

Another message conveyed by these early versions of the mixed-ability grouping policy was that the MOE attended more to the structure of pupil grouping rather than to what really happened inside classrooms, especially in the mixed-ability grouping classrooms. Although enhancing teaching and revising teaching materials were both mentioned in the mixed-ability grouping policy texts, they were considered to be the preparation for teaching streamed and set classes. For example, the 1979 and the 1982 versions of the mixed-ability grouping policy both stated: 'The adoption of setting and streaming should be accompanied by the enhancement of teaching methods, teaching material selection and assessment'; there was nothing that mentioned the teaching in mixed-ability groups. In other words, teaching mixed-ability groups was not seen as a challenge at that time; and the popular ideology was that using mixed-ability grouping was more a concern of pupils' emotional and social development rather than a consideration of pupils' academic learning.

4.1.3.3 The context of practice

After the issue of the mixed-ability grouping policy in 1979, the MOE circulated the policy through local educational authorities into schools in a strictly top-down approach. Later in 1982, after discovering that only few or even no schools followed the regulation, the MOE claimed it would impose sanctions on school administrators, inspectors and local

educational authorities for violating the policy¹⁴. To create conformity through order and sanction was the main theory the MOE held to facilitate change, which corresponded to the governing philosophy during the autocratic regime.

Further, while the education system was highly controlled, the MOE held a 'rational perspective' towards the practice of the policy, in which they assumed the front-line policy actors would react to policy with uniformity (Malen & Knapp, 1997). This rigid and naive perception of the policy process prevented the MOE from realising the complexity of the policy process. For example, it has been found that the MOE did not view evaluation as an important stage in the policy process. There were very few evaluation conducted by the educational authority during this period to understand the actual practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy or to re-examine the policy or the implementation of the policy.

Although the official inspectorial system was heavily relied on by the MOE, it was argued that the official results were often contradictory to common knowledge. For example, after the 1982 regulation had been issued, the Taiwan Provincial Council of Education briefed the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy to the Control Yuan¹⁵ stating that there were no schools violating the regulation, which was a statement that contradicted popular understanding (T-C. Lee & Y-K. Chen, 1994). This phenomenon suggested the dysfunction of the educational administrative system in the autocratic regime. Whilst the MOE relied on the administrative system (which included the inspectorial section) to supervise the practice of the policy, it can be seen that most of the influential information

¹⁴ There was no further document recording the practice of the claim. In the process of the policy, the MOE claimed that they would impose sanctions on schools several times, but it is questionable whether the claim was actually put into practice.

¹⁵ One of the five central offices in the central government of the Republic of China. According to the Constitution and its additional articles, the Control Yuan has the powers to impeach, censure, audit, and take corrective measures against governmental agencies.

that affected the MOE's actions and later decisions came from other sources or external pressure. Most of the school practices were revealed by anecdotes and media reports, and these publicly reported stories and subsequent discussions were often quoted when the MOE made policy revisions.

Further, the relationship between the inspectorial system and schools was argued as unprofessional. Both the media's commentary and the local county councillors publicly questioned inspectors' ability and willingness to reveal the existing problems in junior high schools (N-P. Lin, 1986, p. 6; "Bribe into," 1987, p.8). The media and the local county counsellors even harshly criticised inspectors saying they were the schools' accomplices in the violation of the mixed-ability grouping policy because inspectors often concealed the real practice in junior high schools (N-P. Lin, 1986, p. 6; "Bribe into," 1987, p.8; Taipei City Council, 1984). These phenomena suggested that the centrally controlled educational personnel training system produced a closed and conservative atmosphere where the educational administrative system became bureaucratic and lacked the ability to self-criticise and improve junior high level education.

In terms of the practice of schools, as mentioned above, most schools reported to the educational authority that they followed the regulation while the popular experience was that a strong divide between higher and lower attaining classrooms was still prominent in schools. For example, whilst the 1985 version of the mixed-ability grouping policy mandated that pupils should mainly be placed in mixed-ability groups and could only be set in certain subjects after entering the second grade, it was reported by teachers and parents in the media that the schools still used streaming for all three years in junior high schools (N-P. Lin, 1986, p. 6; Hung, 1988, p. 9).

It was also found that the attitudes of school educators during that period mostly favoured streaming. C-H. Chang and S-Y. Kuo (1984) had some interesting findings when

analysing a survey commissioned by the MOE. While they found that more than half of the teachers were in favour of streaming, only 27% of the teachers thought streaming had a positive influence on pupils' physical and psychological development; and 57.8% of them admitted that they favoured the pupils who were placed in higher ability classes. Nonetheless, given that the policy still approved the adoption of streaming before 1985, there was less resistance shown by school educators towards the mixed-ability grouping policy. It was not until the issue of the 1985 version of the mixed-ability grouping policy, which prohibited the use of streaming, that educators started to express their doubts about the mixed-ability grouping policy. Although the MOE argued that the regulation was revised with the endorsement of representative school administrators, the 1985 version of the mixed-ability grouping policy prompted fierce objections. For example, while recognising the positive intentions of the policy, the concerns over complicated administrative work, classroom management, the rigidity of teaching materials, the lowering of pupil attainments and the pressure imposed by parents and local county councillors were argued by school administrators and teachers ("Support Setting," 1985, p. 2; M-H. Shih, 1985, p. 6; "The Reactions," 1985, p. 6; M-H. Shih, 1985, p. 7; "Setting Confused," 1985, p. 7). Although on the surface the education system was under strict centralised control, the practice of educational policy, especially the controversial mixed-ability grouping policy was entangled within the complicated micro-politics within individual schools.

4.2. After the abolition of Martial Law: the start of deregulation

4.2.1. Political era: deregulated society, deregulated education

The abolition of Martial Law in 1987 was a crucial change in Taiwanese society. After the abolition of Martial Law, governmental control over the politics, the economy and society of Taiwan started to loosen, the mainstream educational ideology gradually changed

and the governance of education was also reconstructed. This study identifies the post-Martial Law period as the second political era that the mixed-ability grouping policy has experienced. After the abolition of Martial Law until today, the mixed-ability grouping policy has also been revised three times in 1991, 1997 and 2004, and the characteristics of this post-Martial Law political era have imposed very different influences on the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy from the previous Martial Law period.

It is generally recognised that the transition from autocratic ruling to democratic governance initially resulted from both internal resistance and international pressure (H-H. M. Hsiao, 2004; N-T. Wu, 1989; Ouyang, 1996; W-N. Wu, 2000). Research studies show that although the Nationalist government applied strict control during the autocratic regime, resistance against the government never disappeared. Underground political activities that promoted the democratic system, Taiwanese independence, and communism kept emerging (H-H. M. Hsiao, 2004; N-T. Wu, 1989; W-N. Wu, 2000). Through the establishment of the local election system in 1950¹⁶, resistors gained limited space for political pursuits. After 1980, the candidates that opposed autocratic ruling started winning in local elections. The voice that demanded democracy grew stronger. This social atmosphere in addition to the succession issue within the Nationalist Party together contributed to the abolition of Martial Law (H-H. M. Hsiao, 2004; W-N. Wu, 2000).

During the 1980s, the economic system in Taiwan was also transformed. Due to the development of the capital-intensive industries and the demand of non-governmental capital, the planned economy and the nation's fiscal system were gradually reconstructed (H-F. Liu, 2007). Moreover, hidden societal problems were quickly disclosed after the 1980s. Only during the period between the announcement of the abolition of Martial Law and the official

¹⁶ It is documented that the Nationalist Party controlled most of the resources in the process of these local elections and that they manipulated election results (Hsueh, 1995).

abolishment, there were 1835 different types of demonstrations held by civil groups and extra-Nationalist Party political groups (W-N. Wu, 2000). Most of the demonstrations involved issues regarding local development, environmental protection, and labour right, and the majority of them were allied with political pursuits to demand an open and democratic political body.

Within this context, the criticisms about the education system were quickly developed by civil groups. In fact, before the abolition of Martial Law, there were already a few small-scale protests held by college pupils against the governmental control. These protests aimed to object to the censorship of expression and publishing imposed on college campuses. After the abolition of Martial Law in 1987, the criticism of the education system spread to the structure and the contents of education. The rise of civil educational reform groups played a crucial role in challenging the existing educational ideology and the education system (410 Education Reform Alliance, 1996; Hsueh, 1995; H-C. Hsien, 2003; W-N. Wu, 2000). For example, in 1988, 1989 and 1994, several civil groups held what was called as 'Civil National Educational Conferences' to discuss existing educational problems. Their objectives were to generate consensus over educational affairs and to form strategies for the purpose of tackling the identified problems (410 Education Reform Alliance, 1996; Hsueh, 1995; W-N. Wu, 2000). The 1994 conference was a landmark. Other than civil educational reform group members, legislators, governmental officers and educational scholars were invited to the conference. Seventeen prestigious educational scholars published fifteen papers to criticise the existing education system. They argued that state control over educational affairs had damaged education in Taiwan. They also criticised the conservative characteristics of the educational administration system and the teacher training institutions (410 Education Reform Alliance, 1996; W-N. Wu, 2000).

Other than utilising the conferences to form consensus and create a reform discourse,

the civil educational reform groups were devoted to the establishment of educational Acts. After 1990, several groups allied with legislators of the opposition political party to revise and establish educational Acts. The 'University Act', the 'Teacher Training Act', the 'Regulation of Parents Participation', the 'Compulsory Education Act' and the constitution of education—the 'Educational Fundamental Act' were all passed or revised at the beginning of the post-Martial Law era (H-C. Hsieh, 2003). This action of establishing educational Acts can be seen as a reaction which aimed to overthrow the previous centralised education system. The rationale of the 'Educational Fundamental Act' proposed by the Taiwanese Professors Association (TPA) and other reform groups clearly indicated that to enforce educational regulations through law is an action to prevent the profession and the autonomy of education from being suppressed by the centralised and autocratic educational administration system (C-h. Chou, 1996; C-h. Chou, 2003; Taiwanese Professors Association, 1993). Therefore, in many newly established Acts the protection of the profession of educational professionals and the protection of people's right to learn are clearly stated in the official texts.

Civil educational groups also promoted their ideologies to the public. Other than the national educational conferences, small-scale petitions were constantly lodged to call for public support. The alliance of civil groups (not only educational related groups) worked well in this period. The members of these groups went to public spaces to meet people and to ask for support (H-C. Hsieh, 2003; W-N. Wu, 2000). In 1994, the first large-scale educational demonstration was held by the alliance of civil groups. The thirty thousand participants in the '410 Educational Reform March' sent clear messages to government that the public demanded an education reform (410 Education Reform Alliance, 1996).

Under enormous pressure, the minister of the MOE at that period, Dr. Wei-Feng Kuo proposed to establish an independent institution to plot education reform policies. The

'Executive Yuan Education Reform Committee' was established. With a special power status and composed of not only educational administrators but also professionals from different areas, the committee represented the official response to the reform appeal proposed by the civil society. Fierce educational debates officially entered governmental institutions, and the dominant ideologies regarding the purpose, the structure and the practice of education were gradually transformed. Two important reforms are presented below. The first is the deregulation of textbooks, and the second is the reconstruction of the purpose of education.

4.2.1.1 Deregulation of textbooks

As mentioned above, some of the civil groups' activities were supported by legislators of the opposition party. Although politicians and educational reform groups may possess different rationales towards the educational reform, their emphasis on deregulation was the same during this period.

Not long after 1987, the Chinese-centred and the nation-centred ideologies embedded in textbooks started to be criticised by legislators of the opposition party (Democratic Progress Party, DPP). They strongly demanded that the previously eliminated materials with regard to Taiwanese history, Taiwanese geography and Taiwanese language should be included in the official curriculum. This demand gradually gained support in society and among educational scholars, which led to reforms in the content of textbooks and the process of textbook production and selection (Mao & C-C. Chang, 2005). The deregulation of textbooks thus started from 1993. Currently, the MOE still holds the authority to censor the content of textbooks, but the production of textbooks at primary and secondary level education has expanded into private and academic sectors based on curriculum guidelines rather than strict curriculum standards (Lan, 2003). The selection of

textbooks has also devolved to schools and teachers (Lan, 2003). Although the control over textbooks (and also the curriculum) in Taiwan can still be seen as centralised compared to other countries, the degree of control has been lessened, and the space for public debates over educational materials has been opened.

4.2.1.2 Revised objectives of education

The establishment of the 'Executive Yuan Education Reform Committee' in 1994 and its successive actions officially started a new era in Taiwanese education. In response to civil society, the four concrete demands made by the 410 Educational Reform March—establishing smaller classes and smaller schools, increasing the number of comprehensive high schools and universities, modernising education, and establishing the Educational Fundamental Act—were incorporated into the educational reform proposals produced by the Committee (Executive Yuan Education Reform Committee, 1996). The Committee issued four reports that analysed the problems of education and provided concrete suggestions. The reports indicated that education in the 21st century should be humanistic, democratic, diverse, technology-oriented, and internationalised; and the four major reform directions proposed included:

1. Deregulation: inappropriate regulations should be abolished.
2. Protection of the right to education: the right to education is a basic human right; the public education system should not serve a specific political ideology; educators should not impose inappropriate authority on pupils.
3. Protection of parents' rights to participate in their children's education: the state should not only demand that parents help their children to complete their compulsory education, but it should also ensure parents' rights to participate in educational affairs.
4. Protection of teachers' professional rights: the teaching profession should be valued.

Teachers' autonomy over teaching techniques and the selection of teaching materials should be ensured.

Later in 1998, the MOE turned the four educational reform directions into "Twelve Education Reform Plans" and four large scale-projects (F-C. Chang, 2002). The 'Twelve Education Reform Plans' cover all areas of the education system from pre-primary education to higher education. Content-wise, the MOE expected to enhance the quality of education by improving the curriculum and the teacher training system; structure-wise, modifying the advanced school entry system and revising the ratio of pupils between academic education and vocational education at senior high school level were two objectives (Executive Yuan Education Reform Committee, 1996).

In sum, with the dramatic change in political system, economic system and societal atmosphere, the period after 1987 constituted a new political era within which the deregulation of the existing education system and the reconstruction of the purpose of education have become dominant educational ideologies.

4.2.2. The education state: an expanded education state with new power relationships

The education state in Taiwan expanded after 1987 with the participation of various non-traditional participants and the changed power relationships between them. With the revision of several educational Acts, especially the Compulsory Education Act, various official decision-making systems that used to only involve the educational authorities were transformed into systems that involve educational authorities, administrators, teachers, parents, civil group members and scholars through newly-established committees (Compulsory Education Act, Article 9; Compulsory Education Act, Article 10; Compulsory Education Act, Article 19; Hou, 2007). For example, the purview of principal selection and

teacher recruiting in primary and junior high schools was devolved to school-based committees that are composed of administrators, teacher representatives, parent representatives and scholars (Compulsory Education Act: Article 9, 2009; Compulsory Education Act: Article 10, 2009; Compulsory Education Act: Article 19, 2009). The addition of these articles in educational legislation is the clear manifestation of power devolution in the post-Martial Law period.

The relationship between central and local educational authorities was also redefined by the newly-established 'Educational Fundamental Act' (Educational Fundamental Act, 1999). With the ideologies of deregulation and decentralisation, the local educational authority is now under the supervision of both the local government and the MOE rather than being directly controlled by the MOE. The 'Local Educational Affairs Consulting Committee', which was mandated to be established as the main apparatus at the local level to supervise educational affairs with diverse participants, can also be seen as a manifestation of the public participation ideology (Educational Fundamental Act: Article, 10, 1999; Tang, 2003).

Moreover, a complicated relationship between civil groups and the traditional education system was formed after the abolition of Martial Law which influenced the process of the education reform in Taiwan profoundly (H-C. Hsieh, 2003; Hsuen, 1985; Ou, 1998; W-N. Wu, 2000). As stated earlier, the restriction on the establishment of different kinds of interest groups, especially the political-related and economic-related groups was loosened after 1988 according to the revised 'Civil Associations Act'. Numerous new and diverse interest groups have been established. Among them, civil educational reform groups grew steadily and utilised various strategies to participate in educational affairs. These groups argued that citizens have the right to oversee governmental affairs, especially educational related affairs which have profound influence on the development of society

(HEF, 1997). Based on this ideology, these groups visited schools, encouraged public opinions, conducted surveys and publicly demanded that the education system to react to their pursuits. Their actions successively opened up the closed education system and gave rise to the later public participation in educational affairs.

Many different kinds of educational related groups have asserted influences at different levels of the education system. They have devoted to discussing specific issues in society, and they pay attention to both policy initiation and local practice. We can see that the larger representative groups, such as National Teachers' Association, which was established according to the revised 'Teacher Act' in 1995, and the NPA have asserted most of their influence in the MOE and Legislative Yuan¹⁷ to lobby legislators and promote relevant educational Acts. The teachers' and parents' groups that have local relevance usually put more efforts into attending to local educational affairs. Other civil educational reform groups, such as the HEF, may either participate in policy-making or interfere with local practice depending on their working strategies.

The relationship between civil educational reform groups and the education system is sometimes characterised as external versus internal (W-N. Wu, 2000). This is because whilst the civil groups contended that the long-standing yet never solved problems in the education system should be disclosed and publicly discussed, the traditional education system often questioned whether these 'external' participants had the 'profession' to discuss these issues and emphasised the orthodoxy of the official system (T-H. Huang, 2002). Nonetheless, scholars have found that the civil educational reform groups have used relatively complicated strategies to influence educational affairs. H-C. Hsieh (2003) identified that civil educational reform groups employed different strategies to resist, cooperate with and compete against the official educational system for both the educational ideology and the

¹⁷ The highest legislative body in Taiwan.

actual educational practices. The actions of the HEF—the largest civil group in Taiwan were cited as examples by Hsieh. She found that although HEF often publicly criticised the problematic conducts of the traditional education system, it also provided and developed alternative ideologies and practices for both the public and school practitioners (H-C. Hsieh, 2003). Moreover, governmental agencies including the MOE, local educational authorities, and schools did respond to these actions from time to time. It was argued that a form of power based on educational ideology has been developed by these civil educational reform groups (H-C. Hsieh, 2003). Unlike the identity-based groups which primarily aim to secure group members' rights, civil educational reform groups in Taiwan have been devoted to developing expertise in targeted educational issues, and their expertise often outweighed other arguments (even the ones developed by the education system) and further directed policy decisions. For example, even under the fierce resistance of the education system, the argument of prohibiting corporal punishment in schools, which was developed by civil groups, dominated the attitudes of the public and further resulted in legislation being revised.

During this period, it can be seen that political space was officially created through the establishment of various educational Acts. Many decision-making mechanisms, such as the selection and the appointment of compulsory level schools' principals and the establishment of different committees in the local educational authorities, now officially include different stakeholders as statutory participants. In addition, political space was also intentionally created by civil groups and the public even when it was not officially opened up within specific educational policies. Before the establishment of these educational Acts, civil groups had already employed strategies to facilitate public debates and to forge public consensus. Further, as mentioned above the media played important role in disseminating information and reinforcing the debates through their own reports. It can be seen as a

reaction to the previous centralised administrative system that the public engaged intentionally to secure and utilise the space for participating in educational affairs.

To summarise, the transformed education state after 1987 manifested the ideologies of the new political era (Hodgson & Spours, 2006). The rights of citizen were promoted, the purposes of education were redefined, and the conflicts over public affairs began to be recognised.

The following diagrams summarise the characteristics of this political era and the corresponding education state.

Table 8: The characteristics of the *political era* after 1987

<i>Underlying societal shift and historical trend</i>	1. Conflicts over the nation's identity 2. The development of capital-intensive and high profit industry
<i>Dominant political ideology</i>	Education is for both the individual's well-being and the nation's progress Power sharing, control being loosened
<i>Educational debates</i>	The abnormal phenomena that existed in schools The quality of education The relationship between different stakeholders

Table 9: The characteristics of the *education state* after 1987

<i>Scope</i>	Governmental institutions, parents' groups, teachers' unions, civil educational groups
<i>Power structure</i>	Stated power structure in Education Fundamental Act Local educational authority repositioned under both the governance of the Ministry of Education and the local county government Various multi-participant committees established for personnel recruitment, personnel evaluation, and local educational policy making
<i>Education administration</i>	Administrators' tasks redefined as assisting teaching Principals are selected through a multi-participant committee
<i>Teacher</i>	Teachers are trained in the certified programmes in general colleges and recruited by local educational authorities or schools
<i>Parents involvement</i>	The rights and responsibilities of parents in compulsory education are regulated in educational regulations. Parents are identified as the 'partners' of educators.

Table 10: Power structure within the education system before and after 1987

Changes/regimes	Before 1987 Under autocratic control	After 1987 Democratic governance
The Education system	Centralised	Gradually decentralised
Legal status of educational affairs	Administrative order	Legislation
Stakeholders	Within the traditional education system	Traditional education system, interest groups, legalised parents participation
The role of education	A means of control	Asset of the public and the country

4.2.3. The policy cycle in the post-Martial Law period

As demonstrated above, the wider contexts, including the political, the economic, and the educational contexts in Taiwan have gradually changed since the abolition of Martial Law. The process of the mixed-ability grouping policy has also gradually changed with the infusion of different mainstream educational ideologies and the reconstruction of the education state. This part explores the policy process in the post-Martial Law period. It is the same as the discussion above, although I will discuss the three contexts within the policy process—the context of influence, the context of policy text, and the context of practice separately, it is important to note that the key developments within these contexts were inter-related and should be understood in conjunction with one another.

As demonstrated in the following table, the mixed-ability grouping policy was also revised three times in 1991, 1997, and 2004 in the post-Martial Law period. The revisions made in 1991 and 1997 added new codes to clarify the definition of mixed-ability grouping and the procedure of grouping pupils into classes; the 2004 legislation and the corresponding regulations added codes regarding the governance of the policy. The influences that contributed to the revisions and the policy practice will be discussed in the following sections.

Table 11: The four versions of the mixed-ability grouping policy in the post-Martial Law period (1987~)

<p>1991: Administrative order (The Execution Codes of Grouping Practice for Junior High School Pupils)</p> <p>Revised the grouping regulation to:</p> <p>All grades of junior level education are mandated to use mixed-ability grouping: Pupil allocation should be conducted based on pupils' IQ scores or through an open lottery. If pupils' IQ scores are utilised, pupils' scores should be ranked first and then pupils should be grouped based on the S-shape selection of their ranks. If an open lottery is applied, then pupils should draw their placements by themselves.</p> <p>The mixed-ability groups that pupils are placed in in the first grade should be kept the same without adjustment in the second and the third grades.</p> <p>The leading teachers in the mixed-ability classes should be decided by an open lottery.</p> <p>Revised the code: <i>'In order to improve vocational education, junior high schools can establish vocational classes in the third grade, but the establishment of a fixed 'vocational class' and an 'advanced school entry class' is not allowed' to 'Junior high schools could follow the 'Regulation of Junior High Level Vocational Education' to improve the vocational education for the third grade pupils'.</i></p> <p>Add one code: Under the principle of using mixed-ability grouping, the third grade of junior high level education could establish different groups with regard to pupils' future paths to accommodate the different interests, aptitudes, ability and needs of pupils based on the curriculum guidelines, pupils' preference and the resources of the school.</p> <p>The grouping of pupils should be conducted discretely and special meetings should be held to make the decision.</p> <p>The grouping of pupils should follow the preferences of parents or pupils.</p>
<p>1997: Administrative order (The Execution Codes of Grouping Practice for Junior High School Pupils)</p> <p>Revised the grouping regulation to:</p> <p>All grades of junior high level education are mandated to use mixed-ability grouping. The mixed-ability groups established in the first grade should be kept through the second and the third grades.</p> <p>Add code: This regulation applies to both public and private junior high schools.</p> <p>Add code: To accommodate the individual differences of pupils, setting in maths and English can be establish in the second grade, and setting in maths, English and science can be established in the third grade. The setting of maths and science can be combined into one set.</p> <p>Add code: The junior high school needs to report to and be permitted by its educational authority to utilise a different grouping practice for special education, educational experiments or sport talented</p>

classes.

Add code: In order to accommodate pupils' individual needs, junior high schools should utilise individual teaching or remedial teaching for pupils with excellent or laggard attainments.

Add code: The central or the local educational authorities should praise and reward the schools that implement mixed-ability grouping, pathway grouping, and vocational education well.

Add code: The implementation of the policy would become a criterion to evaluate school principals. If the school is reported and confirmed to be violating the regulation, the principal and relevant administrators would be sanctioned based on the 'Standard of the Reward and Sanction Imposed on Governmental Employees. '

2004: Law— 'Compulsory Education Act', Article No. 12

All grades in primary and junior high level education should group pupils in mixed-ability groups. Setting could be adopted in order to accommodate pupils' individual differences. The Ministry of Education should issue the relevant regulations.

2005: Law—'The Regulations of the Mixed-ability Grouping and Setting Policy in Primary and Junior High Schools

Addition and revision:

Code 2: The grouping practice of public and private schools should follow this regulation unless it is regulated through the Special Education Act, the Art Education Act or other legislation.

Code 4: All grades in primary and junior high school should group pupils in mixed-ability groups.

Code 5: Every county should establish a 'Mixed-ability Grouping Promotion Committee' which would be in charge of the promotion of the utilisation of mixed-ability grouping.

The committee should be constituted with 11 to 17 members and the chairman of the committee should be held by the director of the local educational authority.

The members should include officers in the local educational authority, principals in primary and junior high schools, the representatives of local teachers' associations, the representatives of local parents' associations, and scholars and experts. Among them, the number of representatives from local teachers' associations and local parents' associations should not be less than one third of the members respectively.

Code 6: The grouping of pupils of primary and junior high schools should be conducted by the local educational authority or the appointed schools. The methods which can be used to group pupils are as follows: Using an S-shape model to allocate pupils based on pupils' attainment ranking. Using an open lottery. Using random allocation.

Pupils who transfer from other schools after the school's completion of pupil grouping should be assigned to a class by an open lottery.

The process of grouping pupils into classes should be made known to the public. Parents should be notified and invited to the occasions when pupils' assignment being made and the officers of the local educational authority should supervise the process.

The result of pupils' allocation should be published within 15 days after the completion of the above procedure. Within seven days after the results have been published, the leading teachers of classes should be decided by an open lottery.

Code 8: Setting of pupils can be conducted in the second grade of junior high level education in maths and English, and in the third grade of junior high level education in maths, science and English.

Code 11: The 'Mixed-ability Grouping Promotion Committee' should design the evaluation system to evaluate the implementation of the policy and they should submit an evaluation report at the end of every school year. The committee could propose the reward and sanction to the local educational authority based on the evaluation.

Code 12: The evaluation of the implementation of the policy should be one of the criteria used to form the overall school evaluation and the principals' merit check. The report will also be considered in future principal selection. The principal and the relevant administrators of the schools that violate the policy should be sanctioned according to the regulations.

4.2.3.1 The context of influence:

I have highlighted that the interest groups, the ongoing education reform and the critical events were the crucial influences that contributed to the revision of policy texts and the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy in the post-Martial Law period.

• *The influence of interest groups*

After 1987, the newly created interest groups utilised several different strategies to raise public awareness of the problematic implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy. They also encouraged the public to demand the revision of policy texts and the enhanced policy implementation.

In terms of raising public awareness of the mixed-ability grouping policy and the need for better implementation, several interest groups such as the NTA, the National Parents' Association (NPA), the Teachers' Rights Association (TRA) and the HEF have been providing assistance to parents and school educators to disclose the mal-practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy to the educational authority and the public. Through complaints filed by parents, pupils and teachers, these groups kept discovering unequal and

sometimes illegal school conduct which often led to public attention and further investigation by the educational authorities. For example, in 1988 a teacher complained to the HEF, the TRA and the Homemakers' Union (HU) that the school he worked at streamed pupils in an unequal manner. The three groups visited the school and demanded that the local educational authority and the school make amendments. This event resulted in discussions within the education system regarding whether interest groups had the right to directly visit and question schools. Nonetheless, there were more and more policy actors, including parents, school educators and pupils cooperating with different interest groups to disclose how junior high schools secretly used streaming in the last twenty years. The traditional education state was forced to face challenges from a much more open and democratic society in the post-Martial Law era.

It should be noted that the surveys conducted by the HEF successfully dominated the discussion of the mixed-ability grouping policy and raised public awareness. As mentioned above, after the issue of the mixed-ability grouping policy, neither the educational authority nor the public had an overall understanding of the practice of the policy. The survey results released by the HEF thus attracted considerable public attention. For example, the survey conducted by the HEF and the teachers' associations in Taichung City and Taichung County in 2001, which utilised information provided by school teachers to conclude that 80% of schools in Taichung City and Taichung County did not follow the policy, quickly forced the MOE and the local educational authorities to declare their determination to inspect the policy practice thoroughly (HEF, 2002).

The HEF continued to conduct several surveys in 2002, 2003, 2008 and 2009 by interviewing pupils in sampled junior high schools¹⁸. In 2002, the HEF found 53.8% of the surveyed junior high schools had violated the regulation; in 2003, 67.9% of the surveyed

¹⁸ See footnote 2 in p. 17 for the detailed of the survey.

junior high schools were found to be using streaming, and in 2008 and 2009 around half of the schools surveyed were reported by pupils to be using disguised forms of grouping, such as gifted and talented classes to form the traditional higher attaining classes (HEF, 2002, 2003a, 2008, 2009).

Among these surveys, the 2003 survey resulted in fierce responses from all the local educational authorities around the country and also from the MOE. The reactions of the local educational authorities varied. Some denied the results, some argued they had insurmountable difficulties and others publicly resisted the policy. Conversely, the MOE took these survey results seriously. It publicly demanded the inspections to be thoroughly conducted.

In short, due to the fact that the authorities' evaluation results are usually contradictory to people's common understanding of policy practice, the information provided by interest groups was not only persuasive, but also powerful.

In terms of gathering public support to demand mixed-ability grouping, it can be found that in as early as 1990 the HEF had already established a lobby group targeting school principals, teachers and parents to promote the adoption of mixed-ability grouping. More than 20 parents participated in the first round of lobbying and they visited 22 junior high schools in Taipei city. Although rejected by many schools, these parents managed to talk to several teachers and administrators who were also concerned about the streaming in schools. Other interest groups such as different local parents' associations and local teachers' associations also invited their members to influence the practice of the policy. In 1997, the Taichung City Teachers' Association launched a petition which one thousand teachers signed to criticise the streaming adopted in schools. Similar actions were taken by different local teacher organisations hereafter in the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy. In addition, when encountering special occasions, these groups collaborated together to form a

strong voice. In 1997, 70 groups formed the 'National Alliance of the Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy' to demand actions against the streaming adopted by schools (HEF, 1997). Further, it was also because of the cooperation of the NPA, the NTA and the HEF that the mixed-ability grouping policy has been enforced through Law in 2004 (Y-M. Hsiao, 2004).

• *The influence of the educational reform*

The second most important influence on the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy was the educational reform, which was initiated from 1994. As mentioned above, the educational reform contributed to the deregulation and decentralisation of the education system in Taiwan. The ideologies promoted in this reform such as educational equality and progressive education influenced the development of several educational policies. In the pursuit of a 'normal' education environment, eliminating the negative influences of any school behaviours, including streaming has become prominent. These newly introduced ideologies and specific terms, such as pupils' right to learn and parents' right to participate in educational affairs have been constantly adopted by both the supporters and resisters of the mixed-ability grouping policy. This observation will be explained in later sections in this chapter.

• *The influence of critical events*

Although the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy has been full of conflicts and controversies, there were several critical events that occurred at specific moments which contributed to the revisions of policy texts and the practice of the educational authorities and schools. These critical events were often initiated by a single policy actor who adopted drastic means to attract attention. Whilst the arguments made by these policy actors were usually strong and persuasive, based on the ideology of providing pupils with equal

opportunities to learn, other policy actors, such as local councillors, local educational authorities, and the MOE usually responded quickly with explicit political promises.

For example, not long after the abolition of Martial Law, a mother whose child was placed in a lower attaining class started a hunger strike to protest against the streaming adopted by junior high schools (Kung, 1990, p. 5, Lai, 1990, p. 4; “Educators Exert Pressure,” 1990, p. 15). She stated that the ‘cow-raising class’ in junior high schools destroyed children’s future (Kung, 1990, p. 5). This hunger strike attracted the attention of several city councillors in Taipei city, where the hunger strike was started. The city councillors publicly condemned the accused junior high school and demanded that the educational authorities take further action (Lai, 1990, p.4). It can also be seen that the Taipei City educational authority, the Taiwan Provincial Council of Education (COE) and the MOE all reacted to the demand (Lai, 1990, p.4). The Taipei City educational authority decided that schools should use a lottery to decide on the leading teachers of each class to avoid special arrangements for special classes. The MOE demanded that several counties should conduct research into the possibility of abolishing the senior high school entry examination as this examination was often argued as contributing to the use of streaming in junior high schools. Further, the COE formed a committee composed of school principals to discuss the revision of the mixed-ability grouping policy. Although it is difficult to measure the influence of the actions taken by the MOE and the COE on the later practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy, since most of these plans were not executed as claimed, the action taken by the Taipei City educational authority to use a lottery to decide the leading teachers of each class was later added into the 1991 version of the mixed-ability grouping policy.

In 1997, a letter written by pupils in lower attaining classes drew considerable public attention. This letter, which included phrases such as ‘since the school violates the

mixed-ability grouping policy, we can also violate school regulations’; and ‘today you give up on us; we will give you all up in the future’ were read by the minister of the MOE at an administrative meeting in front of all the local educational authority officers (Y-P. Chuang, 2006; MOE, 1997a). The media also reported this letter extensively and discussed how pupils were treated in streamed classes in junior high schools. The MOE thus decided to take serious actions regarding the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy. It should be noted that the minister of the MOE during 1997-1998—Dr. Jin Wu—was also the minister that was referred to as being the most devoted to the promotion of the mixed-ability grouping policy (Y-P. Chuang, 2006; F-C. Chang, 2002). With his determination, strategies were quickly developed to improve the adoption of mixed-ability grouping. For example, the MOE claimed that it would revise the content of the senior high school entry examination. It was expected that by simplifying the content of the examination the need for junior high schools to ‘stream to boost pupils’ attainments’ would be abated. Further, the MOE imposed funding-based rewards and sanctions on schools to encourage the adoption of mixed-ability grouping. Although using rewards and sanctions to facilitate the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy had already been mentioned several times, it was the first time that the rewards and sanctions were actually imposed on schools. Additionally, the MOE emphasised the necessity to communicate with parents and local educators about the mixed-ability grouping policy. The minister himself travelled around the whole country to discuss the policy with important stakeholders. Evidence shows the practice of the policy seemed to improve during these two years but that did not last for long (Y-P. Chuang, 2006).

In 2003, an important event directly contributed to the passing of the mixed-ability grouping legislation. Miss Li-Hui Wu, a junior high school teacher who had taught lower attaining classes for years, knelt down in front of the school she worked at and requested

that the schools abolish streaming. Her gesture was broadcasted extensively by media and raised discussion in the newspapers and on the TV news. (H-C. Chien, 2003, p. B2). In the meantime, the HEF published its survey regarding the streaming experienced by pupils in junior high schools¹⁹. The survey showed that 67.9% of the surveyed schools used streaming, which was a relatively high figure after years of implementing the mixed-ability grouping policy (HEF, 2003). Facing the teacher's protest and the survey results, the MOE again held public meetings in all counties in Taiwan to declare its determination to implement the policy (Meng, 2003, p. B8). Further, with the lobbying of the NPA, the NTA and the HEF, the Legislative Yuan added an article to the Compulsory Education Act to demand the adoption of mixed-ability grouping in primary and junior high schools in 2004. The civil groups argued that with the legal status of the mixed-ability grouping policy and the implementation of the policy would be enforced with more powerful policy instruments, and the policy actors would be more aware of the issue (Y-M. Hsiao, 2004).

Nonetheless, even with the enforcement of the mixed-ability grouping legislation in 2004, a documentary produced by the Public Television Station in Taiwan reminded the public that streaming and other forms of division still existed in junior high schools. The documentary—'The Magic Mirror'—found that not only did schools still use streaming, but that some of the lower attaining classes were located in the inferior locations in schools and had inadequate lighting. Further, according to the principals interviewed, other schools also adopted streaming or established special classes to disguise the divide between pupils. He argued that due to the competition between schools, streaming was an important technique to attract academically able pupils. This documentary also gave rise to fierce discussions. On the one hand, interest groups including the HEF, the NTA, the Secondary Students' Right Association and the Taipei City Parents' Association publicly supported the

¹⁹ See footnote 3 in p.17 for the details of the survey.

documentary. The chairman of the NTA at that time argued that the disguise of the anti-education practice in junior high schools was detestable (H-L. Hsieh, 2004, p. 4). On the other hand, parents in the schools studied argued that mixed-ability grouping could not benefit every child. They argued that without enough high quality teachers, schools shouldn't sacrifice the education of the higher ability children by placing them in mixed-ability groups (H-C. Chien, 2004, p. B2).

The reactions of the MOE and the local educational authorities to this documentary were different. While the MOE was determined to promote the mixed-ability grouping policy, the local county magistrates who were concerned about the academic performance of pupils and the demands made by parents, argued that streaming was necessary. (C-C.Wang, 2004, p. B1). It can be seen that the MOE and the local educational authorities considered the practice of the policy from different viewpoints. The MOE focused more on the ideological aspect of the policy, and this ideology aspect dominated the policy discourse in this central level policy arena and the media. However, in the local educational authorities, it was the concerns of pupils' attainments and the politics among schools, parents and the local educational authorities that dominated the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy.

4.2.3.2 The context of policy texts

The revisions of the mixed-ability grouping policy made after the abolition of Martial Law in 1991, 1997 and 2004 all added new articles to clarify the definition of mixed-ability grouping and the procedure of grouping pupils into classes. For example, the term 'setting' which hadn't previously been defined was specified in the 1997 version of the policy which stated that the use of setting should be limited to grouping pupils by certain subjects (English, maths and science) in order to prevent the 'whole day setting', which was a common strategy used by schools to stream pupils under the disguise of setting (MOE,

2003a). Another example is that the regulations revised after 1991 all mandated that the leading teachers of classes should be decided by a lottery, and that the established mixed-ability groups in the first grade shouldn't be regrouped in the second and the third grades in senior high level schools.

The policy texts in the post-Martial Law period were still highly instructional with a top-down manner. However, what should be noted is that whilst the control over pupil grouping procedures seemed to get stricter, the revised policy texts have shown an increasing consideration of other stakeholders. For example, the 1997 version of the policy had a new article which stated that schools had to communicate with parents about the policy (MOE, 1997), which can be seen as a response to the long existing arguments that parents often 'force' schools to violate the regulations. Further, the mechanism of the supervision of the mixed-ability grouping policy has incorporated more stakeholders. A 'Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy Promotion Committee' was mandated to be established in every local educational authority by the mixed-ability grouping policy legislation, and it was suggested that the Committee should be composed of not only school and educational authority administrators, but also parents, teachers and scholars. By incorporating different stakeholders, this new mechanism intends to break the traditional bureaucratic governance over the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy.

This multi-participant ideology, which has been prominent in the newly established educational acts in the post-Martial Law was incorporated into the governance of the mixed-ability grouping policy; and it was the first time that the addition of these policy texts not only attended to the methods of pupil grouping, but also considered the mechanisms that may facilitate the practice of the policy.

In terms of the message conveyed by the revised policy texts, some clearer themes regarding the purpose of the mixed-ability grouping policy have appeared. For example, the

intention to retain the benefits of both mixed-ability grouping and streaming in previous regulations has been replaced by the emphasis on using mixed-ability grouping. The 2004 legislation clearly indicated that mixed-ability grouping is the statutory grouping practice in primary and junior high schools (Compulsory Education Act, Article 12, 2004; Regulations of the Mixed-Ability Grouping and Setting Policy in Primary and Junior High Schools, 2005). Further, the previous regulations that put emphasis on preparing pupils for either academic or vocational career streams, has been replaced by the need to provide extra help for those who fall short of standards or those who surpass standards at certain moments (Compulsory Education Act, Article 12, 2004; Regulations of the Mixed-Ability Grouping and Setting Policy in Primary and Junior High Schools, 2005). The subtle shifts in the purpose of the mixed-ability grouping policy resonated well with the education reform ideology. For example, seeking methods to educate every child, rather than dividing pupils for their initial performance that was emphasised by the Executive Yuan Education Report were clearly stated in the mixed-ability grouping policy (Executive Yuan Education Reform Committee, 1996).

In sum, although the policy texts of the mixed-ability grouping policy still have a top-down and highly instructional manner after the abolition of Martial Law, the messages conveyed by the policy texts have been transformed to emphasise the development of every child in an inclusive rather than a divided environment, which resonate the objectives of the post 1994 education reform.

4.2.3.3 The context of practice

This part discusses the general observation of the policy practice in the post-Martial Law period. The current practice of the policy in the MOE, the local educational authorities and the schools will be presented in chapter 5, 6, 7, and 8.

• *The practice of central governance*

During the long period of controversy over the mixed-ability grouping policy, the MOE proposed many different strategies to tackle the problems that were identified as hindering the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy. Some of the strategies have been proposed again and again by MOE ministers but few official research studies have evaluated these strategies. In exploring the practice of the MOE in the policy, this study identifies that the MOE adopted the following two strategies for the purpose of improving the practice of the policy in the post-Martial Law period. One aimed to tackle the alleged ‘structural factors’ that hinder the practice of the policy; and the other utilised incentives, namely rewards and sanctions to improve policy practice.

First, a long standing argument that dominated the discussion of the practice of the policy is that the large amount of teaching materials, the rigid and packed schooling schedule, and the senior high school entry system together hindered the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy (T-L. Chien, 2004; S-Y. Kou, 1985, p. 2; H-M. Lin, 2004; S-F. Liu, 2004; Yen, 1998; Ma, 2005). It was argued that under these conditions, schools are forced to stream pupils in order to gain higher senior high school entry rates. In dealing with these concerns, the MOE launched several projects for the purpose of improving the senior high school entry system²⁰. In 1993, the MOE started a trial project in several counties which assigned pupils to senior high schools based on their general performance in schools rather than on their one-time test scores. The logic was straightforward: changing the method of pupil assessment would change the schools’ conduct. By implementing the project, the MOE not only expected schools to eliminate the adoption of streaming, it also expected schools to provide a well-balanced education without using corporal punishment

²⁰ The details of the reform policies will be discussed in section 4.4 for the purpose to explore the influence of the senior high school entry system.

or cramming (Chiou, 1996; T-C. Lee, 1993; Yen, 1997b). Pupils who voluntarily participated in the projects were placed in mixed-ability classrooms and after three years they were assigned to senior high schools according to their synthesised performance (academic and non-academic) in school (W-Y. Lin, 1994; Educational Research Committee of the Ministry of Education, 1992). With the implementation of this trial project, the mixed-ability grouping policy was revised to include additions that stated that pupils should be placed in the 'same' mixed-ability groups for three years in senior high level education. Although the MOE did not provide a rationale for the revisions, it seemed possible that it tried to eliminate the opportunity for schools to assign pupils to streamed classes when regrouping pupils every year. Nonetheless, it is argued that this project did not influence the whole schooling structure as was expected (T-y. Shen, 2003; W-Y. Lin, 1994; Ma, 2001). Other than the experimenting classes, schools still used streaming for other classes. Moreover, the scoring system in this project was said to be unfair²¹, which eventually resulted in the termination of the trial project (C-h. Chou, 1996; Yen, 1997b).

The education reform which was initiated after 1994 can also be seen as a reform which aimed to tackle the difficult 'external conditions' that were highlighted by educators. The deregulation of textbooks in 1994 could be viewed as an intention to loosen the rigidity of teaching materials (Lan, 2003; W-N.Wu, 2000). The new curriculum implemented in 2001 further loosened schooling schedule with the intention to replace the knowledge-based compulsory education with ability-based education (H-L. Chen, 1999; MOE, 2000; S-S. Shen, 2005; Su, 2003; C-t. Tsai, 2005; S-W. Yang, 2000). Further, the new senior high school entry system was implemented in 2001 to provide different paths for pupils to enter

²¹ A prevailing argument in Taiwan is that the one-time and writing-based centralised examination is the most just tool that should be used to stream pupils because there is no room for people to manipulate with the examination scores.

senior high schools²²(Tang, 2003). In the meantime, the MOE started to expand senior high and higher education in the hope of mitigating the senior high school entry examination competition and to increase the general education level of citizens.

Other than the reform of the ‘external conditions’, the second strategy adopted by the MOE was to impose rewards and sanctions. Although the efficacy of the MOE’s inspection system, which was the basis of imposing rewards and sanctions, was questioned by the public as mentioned above (N-P. Lin, 1986, Oct 13; “Bribe into,” 1987, p. 8), the MOE kept emphasising its intention to utilise the mechanism to facilitate the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy. Both the 1997 version of the policy and the 2004 legislation specifically listed this strategy in the official policy texts. In 1997, the MOE for the first time announced a nationwide inspection of the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy (MOE, 1997b, MOE, 1997c; MOE, 1998a). Using central funding as an incentive, the first round of inspections rewarded 5 and sanctioned 11 out of 22 counties in Taiwan, and the second round of inspections rewarded 19 schools with extra funding (MOE, 1997b, MOE, 1997c; MOE, 1998a). Compared to the ‘self-report’ style evaluation adopted before, this was the first large-scale inspection conducted by the MOE; and for the first time, the results of the inspections were publicised to the public. It will be demonstrated later that the reward and sanction system was stabilised after the mixed-ability grouping policy was enforced through law in 2004. With the channels established to receive complaints from the public, more inspections were forced to be conducted and regular sanctions on schools or on relevant personnel were given according to the results of the inspection.

• *The practice of local educational authorities*

As discussed earlier, the reconstruction of governing power and the establishment of

²² Other than participating in the joint examination, pupils can also apply to their preferred secondary schools with their synthesised performance in junior high schools.

the Education Fundamental Act in 1999 endowed local educational authorities with stronger powers over local educational affairs (Education Fundamental Act, 1999). Within the new structure, the main governing power over compulsory education is held by the local educational authority, and the MOE has the power to supervise the governance of local educational authorities and to distribute central educational funding. According to the implementation plan for the mixed-ability grouping policy²³, the local educational authorities have the responsibility to follow central regulations, ensure the quality of inspections and impose rewards and sanctions. The local educational authorities can also develop strategies based on the actual practice of local schools to solve identified problems. For example, some local educational authorities utilised computerised programmes to randomly group pupils for all primary and junior high schools within the area for the purpose of preventing schools from being pressured by parents, and for the same purpose, some local educational authorities created detailed regulations for schools to deal with within-school transfers.

However, evidence shows that some local educational authorities questioned the mixed-ability grouping policy. Several local county councillors and local educational authorities argued in media interviews that ‘pupils’ ability to compete’ with others would be weakened if schools used mixed-ability grouping (“Miao-Li County,” 2003, p. 8; C-H. Weng, 2003, p. B2). In 2003, the magistrate of Miao-Li County, Mr. Fu, Hsiao-Peng proposed to form an alliance with other counties to argue that the methods of pupil grouping should be decided by local counties (“Miao-Li County,” 2003, p. 8; Meng, 2004, p. A1). Although the alliance wasn’t formed successfully, the action revealed the tensions that would be created by the new power relationship between the MOE and the local educational authorities.

²³ See Appendix.

In short, with the increased authority over compulsory education within counties, the local educational authority's practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy became complicated. On the one hand, the local educational authority has the responsibility to implement a national policy, especially when the policy is legislation; but on the other hand, the power reconstruction has placed compulsory education in the local-politics arena. The considerations of the interests of powerful stakeholders and the local expectations of junior high level education made the local educational authority's practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy profoundly complicated. Detailed discussion of the practice in individual local educational authorities will be presented in chapter 6.

• *The practice of schools*

In terms of the practice of schools after the abolition of Martial Law, it seems that with the attention of the interest groups and the public, the obvious divide between higher and lower attaining and between academic and vocational classes in normal school hours in junior high schools has slowly decreased (Y-P. Chuang, 2006). However, it has been argued that different styles of streaming have been developed. Particularly after 2004, when the mixed-ability grouping policy was enforced through law, both the media and various teachers' and parents' groups indicated that more schools were establishing special classes, such as gifted and talented classes²⁴ to stream pupils (L-Y. Lu, 2004; Y.-H. Hsu, 2005; Taoyuan County Teachers Association, 2006; Taoyuan County Teachers Association, 2008). According to the interviews with Dr. Luo, Qing-Shui—the executive secretary of the Special Education Unit in the MOE, during the 2005-2006 school year there were 678 gifted and talented classes in junior high schools²⁵, and among them 110 had been newly

²⁴ In Taiwan, the term gifted classes are used to indicate the maths, English and science gifted classes while talented classes are adopted to refer to art, music and PE classes.

²⁵ There were a total of 736 junior high schools in Taiwan in 2006 (MOE, 2010).

established in 2005 (Han, 2006, p. A7; H-Y. Shen, 2006, Sun & C-Y. Lin, 2005, p.C7). Further, a joint entry examination for the junior high school gifted classes was held in four counties, within which more than twenty thousand pupils registered to take the examination (Y-P. Chuang, 2006; S-M. Wang, 2006). Interest groups including the NPA and the HEF criticised the phenomenon publicly. They argued that the ‘gifted class’ burgeoning in junior high schools after the passing of the mixed-ability grouping ‘legislation’ was only a substitute for the old higher ability classes (L-Y. Lu, 2004). Recent surveys suggested that the implementation of the policy was still struggling. The pupil survey conducted by the HEF in 2008 and 2009 indicated that more than 50% of the junior high schools surveyed were indicated as using streaming to establish higher and lower attaining classes in schools (HEF, 2008; HEF, 2009). Media reports in these two years also showed that schools now utilised more subtle strategies to elude the inspection of the local educational authorities. For example, some teachers indicated that schools asked pupils to run back to their assigned classrooms when the inspectors came to schools; and some teachers indicated that some of their better academically performing pupils were selected for special classes without this being recorded in any official documents (P-L.Wu, C-C. Shen, H-C. Chien, & L-Y. Hsieh, 2008, p. A8).

In schools’ defence, parents’ demands were the most important factor that influenced the schools’ pupil grouping practice (T-L. Chien, 2004; Y-P. Chuang, 2006; C-H. Weng, 2003 p. B2). The lobbying of powerful parents and local councillors placed pressure on schools. Further, schools educators argued that they were competing to recruit higher attaining pupils and they suggested that streaming was the most important strategy that was utilised by many schools in this competition (“To Produce,” 2004, p. A2). This detailed discussion of schools’ consideration and their actions will be presented in chapter 7 and 8.

In short, it can be seen that although the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping

policy has been faltering since its inception, the two distinctive political eras and education states in the long process of the mixed-ability grouping policy have exerted their different influences in the context and influence, the context of policy text and the context of practice. The following two sections will further discuss the evolution and the transformation of the contested key issues within the long policy process. The purpose of the discussion is to learn how the interpretations of these key issues evolved within their changing wider contexts, and how the disputes about the key issues influence the process of policy.

4.3. The Political Space in the policy process

The analysis above showed that political space has existed within the long process of the mixed-ability grouping policy. However, it was found that within different political eras, the actual space that was opened up, the influences of the opened space, and the policy actors who have the power to influence the policy process varied due to the characteristics of the political eras and the education states.

In the Martial-Law period, scholars and the media made efforts to open up political space to discuss grouping practice-related policy. They did gain attention due to the consonance between their arguments and the mainstream educational ideology. However, from the analysis of the policy practice we can see that although the arguments made by scholars and the media resulted in the issue and further revisions of the mixed-ability grouping policy, it did not enter the context of policy practice.

After the abolition of Martial Law, we can see that political space within the context of policy practice has been expanded intentionally by the pursuits of the public and the civil groups. More different policy actors gained statutory rights to participate in educational affairs, and they kept creating different kinds of space to engage in the policy process. These intentionally created spaces not only forged continuous debates about the mixed-ability

grouping policy, it also raised the awareness of the public about the possibility for them to participate in educational affairs. In Chapter 5, we will see that the ‘complain hotline’, which was set for the purpose of inviting the public to supervise the policy practice, has become a crucial source for the local educational authorities to monitor the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy.

In general, the opening up of political space in the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy helped facilitate the change of policy texts and the supervision of the policy practice. However, we see less concern regarding the teaching and learning in different kinds of groups. Although there were scholars participating in the policy process in the Martial Law period, most of them were psychologists who were concerned more about the effects of using streaming. It was found that only a few educational researchers engaged in utilising political space in the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy and they rarely went further to discuss teaching and learning. This phenomenon may be related to the fact that the mixed-ability grouping policy has long been positioned in relation to the methods of grouping but not to methods of teaching. However, this study suggests that it may also be because a space which can be used to facilitate the practice of policy through teaching and learning has not been officially opened up by the education system. This reminds us of the complicated dimensions of political space. Different policy actors usually hold different expertise and various degrees of power within different kinds of political spaces in the policy process. In the mixed-ability grouping policy the civil groups seemed to dominate the debates. It is important to note, however, that these groups actually fought for the space by themselves. This study thus suggests that other policy actors, such as educational researchers should be more creative in creating a suitable space to exert their concerns and influences.

4.4. The transformation of the contested key issues

Two key contested issues that exist in the debates about the mixed-ability grouping policy identified by this study are the interpretation of pupils' ability and the imagination of classroom teaching. In the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy, opinions about the two issues have been constantly argued to either support or oppose the policy. The following analysis will show that these arguments are not isolated from their wider contexts; rather, they are influenced by dominant educational ideologies in a way that the prevailing concepts are tactfully utilised to support these different and even contradictory contentions.

4.4.1. The perceptions of pupils' ability

As mentioned above, the mainstream educational ideology in Taiwan has transformed from emphasising utilising education as a means of national development to viewing education as the contributor to the development of both the citizens and the country. This transformation can also be detected through the change of the perceptions of pupils' ability.

As demonstrated earlier, a 3:7 ratio between the number of pupils who can enter academic and vocational high schools was predetermined by the MOE in the Martial Law period (Hsieh et al., 1996; Executive Yuan Council for Economic Planning and Development, 1973a, 1973b; Ye & C-Y. Lin, 2008). This policy not only directly influenced pupils' study and career paths, but also influenced people's perception of pupils' ability. In the earlier formal policy texts of the mixed-ability grouping policy²⁶, although mixed-ability grouping was promoted, the consideration of pupils' academic and vocational aptitudes and the divided career paths was constantly mentioned in the texts. The emphasis on the division between the academic and the vocational revealed the rigid and dichotomous perception of

²⁶ In the 1982, 1983, 1985, 1991 versions of the mixed-ability grouping policy, the emphasis of promoting vocational education in junior high schools was listed in the formal policy texts.

pupils' ability. It was in the 1997 version of the mixed-ability grouping policy that the concept of the academic/vocational divide was lessened, and the concern for pupils' personal development was noted. This small yet interesting change in policy texts implies an ideological change within which the accustomed concept of an academic and vocational ability divide is gradually challenged.

This ideological change also influenced the debates on the mixed-ability grouping policy. Although from my general observation, the opponents of the mixed-ability grouping policy tended to argue that pupils' abilities are fixed by an academic/vocational division whilst the proponents contended the diversity of pupils' abilities, it is found that in different political regimes within which different educational ideologies prevailed, both the opponents and the proponents of the mixed-ability grouping policy utilised the universally accepted ideologies to frame and to support their own stances. For example, whilst the mixed-ability grouping policy was proposed in 1979, an argument that contended that instead of using mixed-ability grouping, the establishment of solid academic/vocational streaming in junior high schools would be more beneficial to the development of society was proposed by scholars and practitioners (K-K. Hwang, 1982, p. 2). This argument emphasised the academic/vocational divide between pupils and called for differentiated rather than comprehensive education in junior high schools. On the other hand, we can see that the supporters of the mixed-ability grouping policy did not confront the rigid perceptions of pupils' abilities. Rather, they focused more on how the streaming adopted in schools may negatively influence pupils with different abilities, which may further result in negative impacts on society, for example, that people would not know how to cooperate with each other (S-Y. Kuo, 1985, p. 2). In other words, they framed the disadvantages of streaming as social problems without questioning the presumptions about pupils' abilities that are embedded in a streaming system.

In the post-Martial Law period, as demonstrated above the mainstream educational ideology shifted to emphasise the development of personal potential and to provide equal educational opportunities (Executive Yuan Education Reform Committee, 1996). It can be seen that the arguments that were adopted to support and to object to the mixed-ability grouping policy were also reframed. For example, the supporters of the mixed-ability grouping policy argued that a democratic country should value every citizen's ability without there being discrimination in schools (HEF, 1997), and the opponents argued that whilst every pupil's individual abilities should be valued, offering an identical education would not only lessen the equality of education, it would also hinder the unique development of different individuals, especially the elite pupils (C-H. Chen, 1990, p. 26; S-Y. Chiu, 1992, p.10; C-C. Shen, 1997, p. 19; H-C. Huang, 2003, p. B2). Another example of how different opinions were framed with similar ideologies was the way that the policy actors utilised the prevailing multiple intelligences theory to support their stances. Those that questioned the policy utilised the theory to argue that mixed-ability grouping ignored the various differences between pupils (T-L. Chien, 2004). Conversely, those who supported the policy argued that mixed-ability grouping helped teachers to retain an unbiased perception of children's multiple intelligences (T-C. Lee, & K-Y. Chen, 2004).

Overall, with the change in the mainstream educational ideology, both the proponents and the opponents of the mixed-ability grouping policy interpreted pupil's ability within the mainstream framework for the purpose of supporting their own arguments. However, we can see that the opponents of the mixed-ability grouping policy seemed to gradually abandon the stance that arbitrarily place people's abilities into fixed slots and replace it with a contention of 'taking care of the special'. Whilst the contradictory arguments and the actions of different policy actors keep generating debates within the process of the policy, we can see that the evolved mainstream educational ideologies diversify people's

perceptions of pupils' ability, which further contributes to the reconsideration of attainment-based differentiation within education.

4.4.2. The perceptions of teaching in mixed-ability group

Since the issue of the first version of the mixed-ability grouping policy, the concerns about teaching had already been stated in the official policy texts. Statements such as 'schools should alter teaching methods to teach different kinds of classes' and 'schools should provide individualised teaching to pupils who are ahead of or falling behind others' continually appear in different versions of the policy. In the context of practice, teaching has also become an important issue that has been discussed among educators and the most popular teaching-related argument was that the difficulty of teaching in mixed-ability grouping classrooms hindered the practice of the policy (S-F. Liu, 2004; Yen, 1998). Several factors are identified as contributing to the difficulty of teaching in mixed-ability classrooms. Other than the difference in pupils' abilities, external conditions such as the curriculum, large class size, tight schooling schedules, and competition for the senior high school entry examination are argued as crucial (S-F. Liu, 2004; Yen, 1998). This emphasis on the influence of external conditions on the policy practice constitutes a popular discourse within the education system as the difficulty in teaching in mixed-ability groups is a problem that resulted from the wider contexts rather than the problem of 'teaching' itself.

This perspective was also clearly revealed by other educational policies issued by the MOE. Whilst the rectification of the 'abnormal junior high level education' became the main objective of the educational authority after the pursuit of the education reform in 1994 (Executive Yuan Education Reform Committee, 1996), the MOE made great efforts to change the curriculum, curtail class size and reform the senior high school entry system. As mentioned above, the fundamental reform of the curriculum in primary and junior high

schools took place in 2001 and was based on the ideology that the curriculum should help develop pupils' abilities rather than just provide sheer facts and hard knowledge (Jan, 2000; T-j. Chen, 2004). With this curriculum reform, the content of the curriculum has been curtailed and the embedded philosophy of teaching has also been shifted to value innovative teaching (Jan, 2000; T-y. Chen, 2004). Further, in order to facilitate the innovative teaching in schools, the reform also deregulated school management for the purpose of providing schools and educators with more flexibility in their teaching.

The senior high school entry system has also gone through changes with regard to the channels pupils can utilise to enter senior high schools (through examinations or other methods) and the content of examinations²⁷ since 1991. According to the MOE's rationale, all of the above policies aimed to provide an improved teaching environment for school educators so they could abandon the existing 'abnormal education', including their heavy reliance on streaming (Executive Yuan Education Reform Committee, 1996). In other words, it can also be seen from the actions taken by the MOE that the prominent attitude towards teaching in mixed-ability groups is that without changes to the external conditions, teaching in the mixed-ability grouping policy will always be difficult.

Conversely, an alternative view of teaching in mixed-ability groups has been proposed by the HEF, a civil educational reform group that is devoted to supporting the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy. In the book published by the HEF, Shih Yi, the founder of the HEF and also a university mathematics professor, provided a very different perspective for looking at teaching in mixed-ability classrooms (Y. Shih, 1998). Shih (1998) argued that although external conditions influence the teaching in mixed-ability groups, the most essential problem may be the lack of imagination regarding mixed-ability grouping teaching.

²⁷ The details of the evolution of the senior high school entry system are discussed in the next section in this chapter.

He stated that Taiwanese teachers believed that the objective of teaching was ‘to help pupils acquire certain hard knowledge or skills in a certain amount of time’, and the process of learning and teaching in classrooms was rarely discussed as a professional issue. He argued that while dictation and testing were the main methods adopted to teach and to assess pupils’ learning, most school educators did not have alternative views of teaching in any kind of classrooms, including mixed-ability classrooms. Shih’s argument was echoed by researchers such as P-C. Chen, (1999), who suggested that the dominant ‘nation-centred’ educational ideology in the Martial Law period in fact prevented teachers from being innovative in relation to alternative methods of teaching. Chen also argued that the teaching reform required teachers to be ‘transformative intellectuals’ who could not only be aware of the external constraints, but who could also have the ability to reflect by themselves. In other words, this perspective implies that the teaching reform would not automatically be successful even though the external conditions are improved. On the contrary, it emphasises that it is through educators’ self-examination of their accustomed practices that changes in the classrooms will occur.

To summarise, although there were different opinions regarding the issue of the difficulty of teaching in mixed-ability groups within the process of the policy, the argument concerning the external conditions of school teaching has occupied the discussion and has influenced the directions of the education reform. Whilst the education reform that attempted to improve the educational environment in Taiwan has been in place for more than 10 years, it is necessary to further investigate whether first-line educators’ perceptions of teaching in mixed-ability grouping have altered with this external change, and further, whether teaching in mixed-ability groups is a complicated issue that is inevitably entangled with local politics. This part of the exploration is discussed later in Chapter 7 and 8.

4.5. The influence of the senior high school entry system

This section investigates the evolution of the senior high school entry system from the inception of the mixed-ability grouping policy until today to determine how the system has influenced Taiwanese junior high level education and the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy. As can be seen from the above analysis, the senior high school entry system has been argued as playing a crucial role in the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy. The methods the system adopts to assess and to allocate pupils into different streams in senior high level education, which include joint examinations and centralised allocation, and the fact that the system pre-determines the distribution of resources in senior high level education influence the junior high school schooling and people's expectation of it.

4.5.1. The evolution of the senior high school entry system

4.5.1.1 Martial Law period: The joint secondary school examination

The senior high school entry system in Taiwan was revised several times during the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy. Here I will primarily discuss the system that was adopted after the extension of compulsory education in 1968. Between 1968 and 1998, the senior high school entry system in Taiwan was stable. It was after the abolition of Martial Law that the frequency of the discussions about the reform of the system increased.

Scholars identified two main characteristics of the senior high school entry system adopted between 1968 and 1998 in Taiwan—utilising a 'joint examination' and recruiting pupils through a centralised allocation system (T-y. Shen, 2003; T-m. Hwang, 2008; Ma, 2001; Ma, 2007). In this system, junior high school graduates had to take a joint examination which was specifically designed for specific types of schools. For example,

there were three joint examinations designed to recruit pupils to three-year senior high schools, three-year vocational high schools, and five-year vocational junior colleges. Almost all pupils took the three-year senior high school joint examination in the hope of being able to get a place at the 'most promising senior high schools' (Tang, 2003; T-m. Huang, 2008).

The content of the joint examinations was designed by a mission-based committees and was based on the content of the centralised textbooks. It has been indicated that the content of these joint examinations was difficult, rigid, and mainly focused on pupils' familiarity with the content of the textbooks (M-C. Hsu, 2001; M-C. Hsu, 2009; Kuan, 2007).

Pupils were distributed to schools based on their score in the joint examination. Within this system, both pupils and schools were ranked by the examination scores. Pupils tended to choose schools based on the school ranking which was produced by the average scores of the recruited pupils, and only the pupils who obtained satisfactory scores had the chance to go to the higher ranking schools.

According to official statistics, the senior high school entry rate of junior high graduates rose steadily after 1977 from 60% to 80% in 1987 (MOE, 2010). However, the ratio between the capacity of academic senior high schools and vocational senior high schools was strictly controlled by the government during this period. As mentioned earlier, during this period the MOE encouraged the establishment of public and private vocational senior high school based on the nation's manpower plan policy which was designed by the Council of Economic Planning and Development (Chu, 2007; L-Y. Lu, 2002). After 1971, the number of pupils in vocational senior high schools outnumbered those in academic high schools for the first time in the history of Taiwanese education. In 1982, the ratio between pupils in vocational senior high schools and academic senior high schools reached the expected 7:3. It was after the education reform in 1994 which had the objective of 'establishing more public high schools' that the ratio between the two types of school

bounced back to 5:5 which lasts till today (MOE, 2010). Before the reform, the MOE believed that this senior high school entry system was designed to match the educational structure with the economic structure (W-C. Cheng, 2001; Executive Yuan Council for Economic Planning and Development, 1973a, 1973b). It was argued that the nation should 'plan' the economic development along with the educational development in order to make the best use of the available manpower in the nation (W-C. Cheng, 2001; Executive Yuan Council for Economic Planning and Development, 1973a, 1973b; W-N. Wu, 2000).

As suggested earlier, the mixed-ability grouping policy was issued due to the fierce criticism of streaming adopted in schools that divided pupils into the 'senior high school entry classes' and the 'cow-raising classes' (C-H.Chang, & S-Y. Kuo, 1984). Whilst the term 'cow-raising class' is used to refer to the classes where low attaining pupils are grouped and which receive little attention from teachers (in the same way that cows that do not need much attention from their keepers), the term 'senior high school entry class' clearly reveals the relationship between the senior high school entry system and the streaming adopted in schools. It has been argued that in senior high level education in Taiwan, to stream pupils is to select and to ensure that those who have the ability to succeed in the senior high school entry system get the resources they deserved (Y. Chen, 2003; Y-H. Hsu, 2005).

In the early stages of the mixed-ability grouping policy process, few people directly discussed the influence of the senior high school entry 'system'. Rather, it was argued that the 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi' (升學主義) of parents influenced the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy. It is difficult to use a proper English term to describe 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi'. Nonetheless, it is a term that is commonly used in Taiwan to describe a 'fanaticism' or 'obsession' about having a good academic performance in schools and entering the most prestigious schools, regardless of the level of education. According to K-S. Yang, and C-C. Yeh, (1979), 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi' is a phenomenon where people

make an enormous effort to compete in the advanced education entry examination without considering their own or their children's aptitudes, personalities, interests, family wealth or the functions of the credentials. P-H. Huang, (as cited in C-W. Wang, & W-Y. Lin, 1994) provided a similar definition. He argued that when people pursue the opportunity of entering the higher ranking schools and disregards his or her own abilities or preferences, then he or she is demonstrating the 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi'. Further, C-W. Wang & W-Y. Lin, (1994) argued that it is not only parents and pupils who demonstrate the 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi', principals and teachers in junior high schools also have a similar ideology. They stated that as schools internalise the pursuit of obtaining the high advanced school entry rate as the main objective of their jobs, they too demonstrate the 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi'. It is due to the 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi' belief and behaviour of schools that educational policies are often criticised as being 'impractical' which is why they are often ignored.

The term 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi' has also frequently been mentioned in official statements, school arguments and academic works (K-S. Yang & C-C. Yeh, 1994; C-W. Chuang, 2006; H-F. Hsieh, 2008; T-m. Hwang, 2008; S-Y. Lin, 1995; P-F. Tsai, 2008; C-W. Wang & W-Y. Lin, 1994). For example, in a discussion with local inspectors in 1982, the Chief Councillor of the Council of Education of Taiwan province, Mr. Huang, Kun-Hui indicated that:

'Most junior high schools now adopt streaming due to the influence of parents and the 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi'. The abnormal grouping practice adopted in schools has distorted our education and has long been criticised by society...' ("Banning streaming," 1982, p2).

In a news story which reported the reactions of several junior high school principals to the issue of the 1985 version of the mixed-ability grouping policy, principals argued that schools were 'forced' to stream pupils in order to respond to the 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi'

demonstrated by parents (“The Reactions,” 1985, p.6). Professor Sheng-Yu Kuo, who was a renowned professor at the National Taiwanese Normal University and actively participated in the public discussion on the mixed-ability grouping policy, also pointed out in his newspaper column:

Why would schools covertly violate the mixed-ability grouping policy? To get down to bedrock, the ‘Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi’ is the root of this abnormal phenomenon. Having this obsession about entering the advanced schools, parents use the senior high school entry rate to evaluate schools and they impose enormous pressure on schools. The junior high schools are afraid of losing pupil intake, thus we see many school educators just ignore the educational ideologies that they learned before.....(S-Y. Kuo,1985,p.2)

Although later researchers stated that the ‘Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi’ is a product of the senior high school entry system (W-C. Cheng, 2001; Y-H. Hsu, 2005; Ma, 2007), the arguments made during the Martial Law period usually separated the ‘Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi’ from the senior high school entry system as they described the ‘Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi’ as a cultural phenomenon that is manifested through individuals rather than a phenomenon that is related to and reinforced by an intentionally designed structure.

It is also found that very few statements made by the MOE before the abolition of Martial Law discussed the senior high school entry system directly. Although few scholars used to propose to overhaul the senior high school entry system by modifying its methods of measuring pupils’ learning and distributing pupils into different senior high schools, almost all of the proposals were not implemented (C-H. Chien, 1999). Under the ‘manpower planning’ ideology, the revision of the system mainly focused on establishing more senior high level vocational schools and strengthening vocational education.

4.5.1.2 Post-Martial Law period: The junior high school graduates voluntary senior high school entry programme

After the abolition of Martial Law, criticism regarding the senior high school entry system increased. While civil reform groups harshly criticised the ‘abnormal’ education, which included matters such as corporal punishment, constant testing, and streaming in junior high schools, the Minister of Education Kao-Wen Mao proposed to reform the senior high school entry system. He stated:

The aberrant phenomena in our education today are resulted from the competition of the advanced school entry examination and the prioritisation of academic performance. To eliminate the phenomena, the reform of the peripheral conditions (of school education) will be our primary objective (of reform) (Ministry of Education, 1991).

The peripheral conditions referred to by Minister Mao included teaching materials, teaching methods and the advanced school entry examinations (Ministry of Education, 1991). In the earlier ‘Sixth National Meeting of Educational Development’, Kao-Wen Mao singled out the dimensions of the senior high school entry system that were of concerns. He stated:

The education in primary and junior high schools has not been normalised. The main reason is that the ‘advanced school entry pressure’, which is a resulted of pupils’ desire to enter better senior high schools and the senior high school entry examinations, burdens our pupils...In the meantime, the Ministry of Education has established special committees to conduct research on the improvement of test content and the school recruitment system. Our objective is to design a reasonable and fair system that may help ‘normalise’ the teaching in primary and junior high schools (Ministry of Education, 1988).

The civil educational reformers and educational scholars during the post-Martial Law period were also concerned about the reform of the senior high school entry system. In diagnosing the problems of the system, they stated that senior high level education, which

was streamed and stratified, was part of the cause of the fierce senior high school entry competition (Y-H. Chang, et al., 1996; H-C. Hsieh, et al., 1996; W-Y. Lin & C-W. Wang, 1995; Y-J. Yang & H-L. Wu, 1995).

The first implemented policy regarding the senior high school entry system was issued within this atmosphere of education reform. In 1989, the MOE proposed the 'junior high school graduates voluntary senior high school entry programme' as the pilot programme of the 12-year compulsory education policy (T.-y. Shen, 2003; Ma, 2001). This programme proposed to use pupils' overall performance in junior schools rather than their test scores in the senior high school entry examination as the criteria to place pupils in different senior high schools. In school teaching, this programme proposed that schools should use mixed-ability grouping and focus on pupils' all-round development rather than only on pupils' academic performance. However, scholars and educational officers discussed the programme extensively, particular in relation to its scoring methods, expected effects, and also the educational philosophy before and during the implementation (C-H. Chien, 1999; Ma, 2007). As the scholars and educational officers could not come to an agreement, the programme was only implemented in a few selected counties. From 1992 to 2003, the selected junior high schools from six counties participated in this programme, and the programme was officially terminated in 2003 with the implementation of the new senior high school entry system.

Although the size of this programme was restricted, it had an important objective to eliminate streaming in senior high level education. Scholars who supported this programme contended that the plan would facilitate mixed-ability grouping and 'normalise' teaching and learning in junior high schools (C-F. Lu, 1994; C-F. Lu & S-J. Huang, 1995; C-F. Lu, 1997). It was also found in the initial evaluation report that the programme did improve the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy (MOE,1998b). However, due to the

emerging doubts about the ‘fairness’ of teachers’ assessments of pupils, the programme never increased in size (C-H. Chien, 1999; Ma, 2001; Ma, 2007; T.-y. Shen, 2003).

4.5.1.3 Post-Martial Law period: The multi-phase senior high school entry programme

Although the ‘junior high school graduates voluntary senior high school entry programme’ was never fully implemented, there were more discussions about the senior high school entry system in the 1990s. In the 1990s, every Ministry of Education minister talked about the reform of the senior high school entry system. It is also clear that in official discourse, the senior high school entry system is related to the problems of junior high level education, including the streaming adopted in schools and the pressure on pupils. For example, Minister Jin Wu (who was in office between 1996 and 1998), who has promoted the mixed-ability grouping policy extensively stated:

Our children have been enormously harmed under the forty-year long senior high school entry system. Education reform cannot wait. To relieve children from the pressure of entering senior high level education, to enter senior high school without being tested should be the ultimate objective of the education reform ... (J. Wu, 1999)

Minister Ching-Chiang Lin (who was in office between 1998 and 1999), who officially implemented the new senior high school entry system—the ‘multi-phase senior high school entry programme’—also argued in his book:

With the increase in educational opportunities, the traditional senior high school entry system cannot fulfil the pursuit of a diversified society and diversified education. However, we cannot ignore the reputation of the fairness of the traditional senior high school entry system, therefore, a new system that combines various senior high school entry pathways could be a possible reform choice (C-C. Lin, 1998).

In another policy-making arena, national legislators also challenged the existing senior high school entry system and argued that the mixed-ability grouping policy would not be

implemented without the system being reformed (Y-P. Chuang, 2006). The connections between the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy and the senior high school entry system were described as a causal relationship and it was said that as long as the system exists, the policy would never be successfully implemented (Legislative Yuan, 1997). Before the reform of the senior high school entry system in 1998, national legislators suggested various changes. These included extending compulsory education to 12 years, increasing the capacity of academic high schools or comprehensive high schools, improving the content of the senior high school entry examination, and assigning pupils to senior high schools based on catchment areas rather than test scores (Legislative Yuan, 1997).

Under the ‘reform atmosphere’, the official reform of the senior high school entry system--the ‘multi-phase senior high school entry programme’ was initiated in 1998, and was fully implemented in 2001 and is still currently in use. According to the official introduction of the programme, the programme has three main objectives: to help senior high schools develop a speciality, to help pupils develop multi-intelligence through normalised and diversified senior high level education, and to provide diverse pathways for pupils to enter diverse senior high schools (MOE, 2004).

The new system aimed to make changes in different dimensions of the system. Firstly, it changed the format and the content of the previous joint examinations. The three separate joint examinations—the three-year senior high school entry examination, the three-year vocational high school entry examination, and the five-year vocational junior college entry examination were combined into one ‘basic competence test’. The test is held twice a year and has become the main criterion for pupils to gain a place at various types of senior high schools today. According to the ‘Committee of the Basic Competence Test for Junior High School Students’, the contents of the ‘basic competence test’ were also reformed by focusing on basic competences rather than difficult questions, and the scoring method has

been changed to a scale measurement. Secondly, the reform increased the variety of ways pupils can gain a place at senior high schools. In the previous system, the majority of pupils were assigned to schools based on their one-time examination scores. Only a very small number were directly assigned to the higher ranking senior high schools through the use of a special examination for gifted pupils. After the implementation of the ‘multi-phase senior high school entry programme’, there are now three main routes for pupils to enter senior high schools—recommendation, application, and score-based distribution. Pupils who use the recommendation and the application routes would be assessed by senior high schools, not only by their scores in the ‘basic competence test’, but also by their various performances in junior high schools. The third change made by the reform is the provision of senior high level education. By promoting the establishment of integrated high schools²⁸, and by promoting the reconstruction of the provision of senior high level education in local areas, the MOE attempts to reform the rigid and highly stratified senior high level education provision in order to eliminate fierce senior high school entry competition (MOE, 2001; C-H. Wu, & C-P. Kao, 2007).

Although the reform was issued with ambitious expectations, the implementation of the ‘multi-phase senior high school entry programme’ has been discussed and questioned since its inception. Several scholars examined the programme from various perspectives. Tang (2003) suggested that the important objectives of the programme, including to enhance junior high level education and to mitigate the pressure on pupils, were not achieved. According to his research, pupils were still constantly tested in junior high schools (most of the pupils interviewed in this study had to take three tests every day), and pupils still felt very pressured in school. Y-J. Hwang & Y-G. Chen (2005) further argued that although the provision of senior high level education has been increased, stratification among schools,

²⁸ The high schools that provide both academic and vocational streams

for example, between public and private schools²⁹, and between academic and vocational schools clearly existed, which eliminated the possibility of mitigating the senior high school entry competition. In addition, scholars also suspected that the so-called ‘diverse pathways’ were not in essence diverse and might in fact reinforce the inequality of educational opportunities. S-M. Huang (2004) argued that the pathways of recommendation and application were in fact advantageous to pupils with a higher socio-economic status. These are the same pupils who had an advantage in the joint examination and joint distribution era. J.-J. Chen & J. Liu (2004) also found that there was a higher ratio of pupils with a higher social-economic status entering public academic senior high schools, which were the schools that everyone was eager to gain a place at.

Further, although the ‘multi-phase senior high school entry programme’ aims to rectify the flaws of the previous system, the new and the old systems actually share some crucial characteristics which seem to result in similar problems. First, the two systems both rely heavily on the centralised examination. In Taiwan, the centralised examination is often argued as being a fair measurement in comparison to other forms of assessment (Ma, 2001), and the pursuit of high test scores in junior high schools often brings about the so-called ‘abnormal education’ where schools put most of their effort into boosting pupils’ attainments and ignore the other dimensions of education. Moreover, although the new system has revised the examination contents, it still only focuses on academic subjects and keeps reinforcing the ‘attainment-centred’ junior high level education (S-M. Huang, 2004). Finally, we can see that although the senior high school intake has increased, the quality, the reputation, and the cost of studying in different types of schools are variable. Whilst the public academic senior high schools usually receive the most resources from the

²⁹ Public senior high schools in Taiwan usually offer better quality teaching and charge lower tuition fees.

government, have a better reputation and cost the least, the competition to gain a place at these schools is still fierce, which again, reinforces the ‘abnormal education’ in junior high level education (Lyau & M-S. Liu, 2004).

4.5.2. The influence of the senior high school system on the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy today

As shown earlier in this chapter, the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy is still in doubt after the reform of the senior high school entry system. The results of the large-scale pupil surveys conducted by the HEF in 2002, 2003, 2008 and 2009 showed that many schools were still eager to stream or to differentiate pupils based on their general academic performance. However, it can be seen that the methods used to stream pupils are more subtle, and the rationales of the differentiation are also ‘evolving’ (F-M.Chuang, 2002, p. 18; HEF, 2002, 2003a, 2008, 2009; C-H. Li, 2002, p. 18; H-L. Lo, 2002, p.18). The influence of the senior high school entry system on the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy was still one of the major barriers cited by principals and local educational authorities when discussing the mixed-ability grouping policy. For example, principals usually argued that schools needed to establish the higher attaining classes in order to raise schools’ senior high school entry rate (H-L. Lo, 2002, p.18); they also emphasised that having a higher senior high school entry rate is crucial to recruit higher attaining pupils (H-L. Lo, 2002, p. 18) and using streaming is the best method for schools to raise the senior high school entry rate (F-M. Chuang, 2002, p. 18).

Whilst similar arguments have been made about the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy over a long period of time, it would be useful to speculate about the influence of the senior high school system on education in Taiwan for the purpose of understanding the dynamic relationship between the structure and the agency in the

education system. It can be seen within this relationship that the agencies strive for their best interests based on their different ideologies and power positions. This study identifies two structural conditions imposed by the senior high school entry system. The first is in relation to its sorting function, and the second is the method it utilises to sort pupils into different senior high school streams—the joint examination.

Firstly, it has been identified that the original senior high school entry system was a centralised sorting system designed to fulfil the manpower planning policy of the Nationalist government (W-C. Cheng, 2001; C-W. Wang & W-Y. Lin, 1994). As mentioned above, the strict divide between academic and vocational schools was established in the Martial Law period in Taiwan. Nonetheless, with the unequal resource distribution in the academic and vocational senior high education, vocational schools have long been viewed as second-rate educational institutions which recruited less able pupils and provided inferior opportunities in life (H-F. Liu, 2007; Y-J. Yang & H-L. Wu, 1995). Under the circumstances, competing for a place at an academic senior high school is the rational choice that would be made by stakeholders. Further, it can be found that the state on the one hand controls the ‘supply’ of diplomas, and on the other hand utilises diplomas, usually the college graduate qualification as the selection criterion to recruit governmental employees who enjoy privileged benefits and high social status, which aggravates the ‘senior high school entry competition’ (K-S. Yang & C-C. Yeh, 1984; W-C. Cheng, 2002). The sense of competition is reflected through both parents’ and educators’ imagination towards the purpose of the junior high level education. For some parents, junior high level education is a preparation phase where children need to work hard in order to compete for better senior high school placements and the possibility of a better future. Therefore, these parents make an effort to secure any resources that may benefit their children with regard to the competition. Streaming and being placed in a special class are viewed as important resources (Y-H. Hsu,

2005). It is also found that in schools, administrators and teachers both pay more attention to the streamed class and expect the high performance of the class to attract more academically able pupils (Y-H. Hsu, 2005).

Secondly, the senior high school entry system in Taiwan influences junior high level education through its utilisation of the joint examination. Although it is debatable whether the examination should be responsible for the 'teaching to test' phenomenon in junior high schools, the specific background of the senior high school entry joint examination in Taiwan turns the examination into something that has a powerful impact on junior high level education. As mentioned earlier, the senior high school entry joint examination in Taiwan has been operated under a structure composed of national curriculum, centralised textbooks, and a centralised teacher training system. Therefore, school educators have been trained to be knowledge transmitters rather than innovative educators in the strictly controlled structure for a relatively long period of time (C-T. Tsai, 2002).

Further, the expected function of the education system in Taiwan has been more economic than educational. Scholars investigated the original rationales embedded in the modern educational system in Taiwan and found that the state treated 'examination' as an important tool to discipline pupils in relation to both personal behaviour and the attitudes towards knowledge (W-C. Cheng, 2001). In other words, the utilisation of examination can be seen as an action to confine the imagination towards the junior high level education. Although the control over the curriculum, textbooks and teaching training was loosened after the abolition of Martial Law, it was suggested that the junior high level education was still heavily influenced by the above 'constraints' (T-H. Huang, , 2005; T-P. Hsu, 2006; Su, 2006).

Under the circumstances, the joint examination easily directs teachers' teaching and teachers' teaching objectives in junior high schools. The term 'examination leads teaching'

is commonly used by the public to criticise the junior high level education. Scholars criticised that junior high education has become the 'senior high school entry industry' which primarily emphasises tests and scores (C-W. Wang, & W-Y. Lin, 1994). It is also argued that school teaching has become 'testing skill training' which emphasises memorisation and repetition (Ma, 2001; S-W. Yang, 2000; C-W. Wang & W-Y. Lin, 1994).

The influences of the examination and the senior high school entry system on teaching and learning were also explored from pupils' experience. In a survey of junior high school pupils and parents, S-Y. Lin(1995) found that 90% of his pupil interviewees felt that school teachers 'extremely' valued pupils' academic performance and the senior high school entry rate. P-F. Tsai, (2008) found that within the senior high school entry system, pupils perceive the value of subjects solely based on the examination. The subjects that are tested in the senior high school entry examination are called the 'main subjects' which are important but boring. Conversely, the subjects which are not tested in the examination are usually considered to be fun but unimportant. Further, H-F. Hsieh (2008) found that in dealing with the senior high school entry examination, teachers utilised different kinds of negative languages to force pupils to work harder in order to obtain higher scores. He also found that the negative language used by teachers lowered pupils' self-esteem.

In the case of the mixed-ability grouping policy, streaming, especially grouping higher attaining pupils, is viewed as an effective way to boost pupils' examination performance. The purpose of establishing higher attaining classes, or even talented classes, is more about boosting pupils' examination scores rather than teaching pupils in accordance with their ability (Y-H. Hsu, 2005). In a letter sent to the MOE in 1997, the higher attaining class pupils described their 'score-pursuit' life:

Not only do the pupils in the lower ability class suffer in the system, we also suffer. For example, there are tests given everyday. Before midterms or finals, we usually have six

or seven tests a day. Pupils who have good grades resent these tests, but pupils who fail these tests become worried. Nonetheless, teachers want to teach all the materials as quickly as possible in order to leave time for us to review them. We just do not have any time to reflect on our learning. Also, in order to boost our grades, the home economics class, computer class, and extra curriculum are all replaced by academic subjects.....("A Letter to the Minister of Education," 1997, p. 3)

In a recent research study on the art talented classes in junior high school, Y-H. Hsu, (2005) also argued:

On the surface, pupils are recruited into this class based on their artist talents. But school teachers are more concerned about pupils' academic learning and performance. Most parents also expect their children to gain a place at the higher ranking academic high schools instead of art related schools or classes (p. 233).

It can be seen that the senior high school entry joint examination, which uses pupils' scores as the main criteria to determine which senior high school they will be assigned to triggers the 'score competition', not only among pupils and parents, but also among school educators. Within this competition, many school practices, including the pupil grouping methods are manipulated as has been shown in above examples.

In sum, through its sorting function and its utilisation of centralised examinations, the senior high school entry system in Taiwan profoundly influences the operation of the junior high level education. Streaming, which is argued as an effective method to ensure the performance of the higher attaining pupils, has become one of the strategies adopted in schools and demanded by parents in order to help their children to succeed in the senior high school entry competition.

Nonetheless, as numerous research studies argued that the senior high school entry examination influences the junior high level education in Taiwan, there is a lack of understanding with regards to how educators within the system perceive the situations they are in and the actions they take. Also, the values and the conflicts generated under the

circumstances have never been identified or analysed. With the absence of such research, the discussion about the problems of junior high level education in Taiwan has been limited. The struggle of the individuals involved in the system, including school administrators, teachers, and parents is left unexplored, which confines our understanding of how the structure and agency interact, reinforce or compete with each other. In this study, the above issues are explored through case studies of two junior high schools for the purpose of providing an alternative view with regards to the relationship between the senior high school entry examination and school educators. The findings are reported in chapters 7 and chapter 8.

4.6. Summary

This chapter discuss the evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy along with its wider contexts in the last thirty years and the key contested issues that have been argued as influencing the practice of the policy.

It is found that in the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy, the shift of political regimes and the opening up of the education states not only reconstructed the mainstream educational ideology in society, but also changed the patterns in which education stakeholders participate in educational affairs. Further, whilst the mixed-ability grouping policy was revised several times and then enforced through law with the changes of the wider contexts, the contested issues, such as the relationship between pupils' ability and the use of mixed-ability grouping and the effects of teaching in mixed-ability groups were also interpreted within the changing mainstream discourses.

In addition, this chapter analysed the influence of the senior high school entry system on the mixed-ability grouping policy and the reforms of the system. It is argued that the sorting function and the examination it relies on to sort pupils aggravate the competition

among parents to secure better resources for their children and also trigger the competition among schools to protect their interests through the use of attainment-based differentiation. At the end of this chapter I pointed out that whilst the existing studies identify the relationship between the senior high school entry system and the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy, a perspective that focuses on discovering a micro-dynamics, namely the struggle and the conflicts generated from the ideological clash of individuals or from the politics within junior high schools is missing. The research conducted in this study which is based on this perspective will be reported in chapters 7 and 8.

Chapter 5 : The governance of the policy

—the Ministry of Education and the local educational authorities

This chapter explores the current practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy in the MOE and two local educational authorities. There are three main issues of concern here: the power structure of educational governance in Taiwan, the style of governance of the mixed-ability grouping policy, and the conflicts the different levels of governing bodies have encountered. This chapter will demonstrate that the top-down control envisioned by the mixed-ability grouping policy is mediated through local politics. On the one hand, the national and legal status of the policy has an influential impact on local practice; on the other hand, local educational authorities manage to balance the conflicts between stakeholders and among different educational ideologies through both actions and inactions.

In the following sections, the statutory roles of the MOE and the local educational authority within the education system and also within the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy are presented first as a demonstration of the ‘intended’ governing style of the mixed-ability grouping policy. In later sections, how the MOE and the two local educational authorities interviewed position themselves in the hierarchy of educational governance and in the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy is investigated. A discussion concerning the influence of the current governance on the equity of education and the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy is presented at the end of this chapter.

5.1. The power structure and the style of policy governance

As suggested in chapter 4, the terms ‘loosen up’ and ‘deregulation’ were promoted in the post-Martial Law period by the civil education reformer, and later in official education

reform policy texts in an atmosphere of anti-authoritarianism and the advocacy of civil rights (H-C. Hsieh, 2003). Not only was the content of education such as textbooks and the curriculum subject to deregulation, but the power structure within the education system has also changed dramatically. These changes were implemented by several new pieces of legislation with regards to the reform of compulsory education, the reform of teachers' and parents' rights of involvement and the reform of local governance. Scholars have indicated that the newly passed legislation contributed to the reconstruction of the decision-making mechanism within which the power relationships among the MOE, the local educational authority, schools, parents, teachers and also civil society was reconfigured (H-C. Hsieh, 2003; Y-N. Hsu, 2008; Ou, 1998; F-Y. Weng, 2003; W-N. Wu, 2000).

According to the 'Educational Fundamental Act', the 'Local Government Act' and the revised 'Compulsory Education Act', the MOE has the power and responsibility to plan national-level educational policies, to support the practice of policy, and to oversee local educational affairs³⁰; and the local counties have the power to manage local educational affairs³¹, which include the financial aspects and direct supervision over compulsory education (primary and junior high level education) through local educational authorities³². Further, it is stated in the 'Educational Fundamental Act' that every local county should establish an 'Educational Affairs Consultation Committee' within which educational administrators in schools and local educational authority, representatives of parents' associations, representatives of teachers' associations, teachers, communities, minority groups, and scholars should be invited to propose, consult, negotiate and assess local educational affairs together.³³ It is argued that the reconstruction of the power structure

³⁰ Education Fundamental Act, Code 9.

³¹ Local Government Act, Code 19 and Compulsory Education Act, Code 16.

³² Every local county in Taiwan has one local educational authority.

³³ Education Fundamental Act, Code 10.

within an education system is a reaction to the centralised control of the central educational authority in the Martial Law period, and through the devolution of power, people's right to participate in educational affairs can be protected and the viewpoints of various stakeholders can be openly discussed (H-C. Hsieh, 2003; F-Y. Weng, 2003; W-N. Wu, 2000).

Nonetheless, it has been pointed out that in practice there are problems regarding the distribution of power and responsibility between the MOE and the local educational authorities. R-J. Wang, Chin, H-H. Cheng, & S-M. Liu (2003) argued that the demarcation of the central and local authorities is not clear, and Y-N. Hsu (2008) also points out that the contradictions between the MOE and the local educational authorities were revealed after the devolution. For example, several national policies, including the deregulation of textbooks and the policy regarding the establishment of gifted classes have been resisted by some local educational authorities who argued that they should have the power to lead over policies for compulsory level education. As demonstrated in chapter 4, the mixed-ability grouping policy was also a policy which was argued should be designed by the local educational authorities rather than by the MOE. We can see that although the conflicts within the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy existed both before and after the reconstruction of the power structure, it was in the post-Martial Law period that local educational authorities started to position themselves as statutorily autonomous bodies rather than the subordinates of the MOE.

5.1.1. The rationale of the mixed-ability grouping legislation

As can be seen from the evolution of the policy, the mixed-ability grouping policy has always been given a national rather than a local status. The passage of the mixed-ability grouping legislation in 2004 further ensured the national status of the policy and endowed it with higher authority.

According to the officer of the MOE, the national status of the mixed-ability grouping policy is derived from the consideration of the equity of educational resource distribution. Miss Wu, the director of the 4th division of the Department of Compulsory Education in the MOE, explained the rationale of enforcing the mixed-ability grouping policy through law:

It is related to the higher values that should be protected under our constitution, which are equality and justice. It is a fact that in Taiwan, as long as streaming is allowed, all resources will be made available to the higher attaining groups. The rhetoric of 'teaching in accordance to pupils' learning ability' was rarely realised in our educational practice. Although it is hard to tell whether the mixed-ability grouping policy would assure that every child receives equal educational resources, we are confident that the policy will bring equity to the majority of the children. That was why the Ministry of Education decided to enforce the mixed-ability grouping policy through law and has encouraged schools to implement the policy.

Furthermore, the MOE considers the mixed-ability grouping policy to be an important policy that would impact on the practice of other policies. Director Wu explained:

From our experience, we know that while schools use streaming, teachers who teach low attaining classes tend to be unwilling to offer pupils more help and tend to justify their use of corporal punishment. Thus, we really need to implement the mixed-ability grouping policy in order to facilitate other equally important policies, such as the zero-corporal punishment policy and the policies that focus on improving teaching and discipline.

At a local level, the officers at the two local educational authorities interviewed in this study both stated that they understood the rationale of the enforcement of the mixed-ability grouping policy through law. They also both clearly pointed out that if the mixed-ability grouping was not national in status local educational authorities and schools would compete to use streaming in order to recruit high attaining pupils and to stratify pupils within schools. Nonetheless, it was also stressed by both of them that although the higher status of the mixed-ability grouping policy has resulted in changes, the practice of the policy is

complicated, within which the interests of stakeholders, the attitudes of local educational authorities and the schools, and the actions taken by stakeholders to deal with conflicts profoundly shape the local practice. This will be elaborated in later sections.

5.1.2. The characteristics of the legislation and the implementation plan

In 2003, the MOE issued an ‘implementation plan’³⁴ for the mixed-ability grouping policy with the intention of endowing the MOE, the local educational authorities and the schools with corresponding responsibilities. The governance of the mixed-ability grouping policy currently is thus mainly based on the 2004 legislation and the 2003 implementation plan. The characteristics with regard to the distribution of power and responsibility of different stakeholders, the instruments adopted for facilitating policy implementation, and the ‘theory of change’, which refers to the perspective adopted to facilitate change (Fullan, 2001), are presented below.

5.1.2.1 The power structure among stakeholders in the mixed-ability grouping policy

First of all, we can see that the mixed-ability grouping policy implementation plan puts emphasis on the differentiation of responsibility. As suggested earlier, the devolution of the educational authority has caused confusion regarding the authority over compulsory education. Therefore in the implementation plan, the MOE intended to specify the different roles and responsibilities of the MOE, the local educational authority and schools by emphasising the principle of ‘responsibility differentiation’. At the beginning of the plan the following statement was made:

The governance of compulsory education is the responsibility of the local educational authority; the Ministry of Education issues this implementation plan based on the

³⁴ See Appendix.

responsibility of supervision endowed by the state.

Nonetheless, due to the legal status of the mixed-ability grouping policy, the governance of the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy is in fact undertaken in a top-down and also hierarchical manner. Whilst the local educational authorities hold the authority to supervise, inspect and also sanction the schools, the MOE holds the authority to supervise, inspect, and sanction the local educational authorities. Further, although in theory the MOE would not go over the heads of the local educational authority to deal with school affairs, in practice, the MOE does investigate individual schools if it suspects that local educational authorities are failing in their responsibilities. This usually happens when local educational authorities show a passive attitude towards investigating complaints. Director Wu explained:

Based on the 'Local Government Act', we usually asked the local educational authority to investigate any complaints directly lodged to the Ministry of Education. It is in the situation where the local educational authority ignored the requests or even showed resistance to the request of the Ministry of Education that we enacted a central level inspection.

In this case, although the implementation plan intends to emphasise the differentiation of responsibility based on the 'Local Government Act', the status of the policy already gives the MOE the highest authority to govern which predetermines the top-down control.

In addition, it can be found in the implementation plan and the legislation that the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy also welcomes and emphasises the supervision of the public. For example, the local educational authorities are required to establish a public complaints hotline, and the process of actual pupil grouping must be conducted in public. The mixed-ability grouping legislation also mandates every local educational authority to establish a 'Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy Promotion Committee'. Members of this committee should include administrators from the local educational

authority, principals from primary and junior high schools, representatives from the local teachers' association, representatives from the school parents' association, and selected scholars. The legislation states that the local educational authority should utilise the committee to supervise and support the implementation of the policy. This style of governing can be seen as an influence of the trend of Taiwanese education reform towards multi-stakeholders participation as opposed to the previous centralised system (H-C. Hsieh, 2003).

5.1.2.2 The instruments adopted and the theory of change

Within the education system, we can see that the MOE has adopted several policy instruments to facilitate the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy. However, a stable system was only established after the passage of the mixed-ability grouping legislation in 2004.

Out of the instruments that have been adopted to facilitate the policy implementation, the MOE has relied on mandate, inspection, reward and sanction the most. The establishment of the policy and its later enforcement through law is in itself an instrument that intends to specify rules and demand enforcement. McDonnell & Elmore indicated that the 'mandate' is usually established to 'benefit a broader community' through a prescribed rule (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). In the case of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan, the MOE stated that the objective of the policy is to achieve the equity of educational opportunity, which is beneficial for the whole society; and the passage of the mixed-ability grouping 'legislation' in 2004 further reinforced the strength of the mandate in the hope of 'creating uniformity' (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987, p. 141).

In order to ensure the implementation of the policy, the MOE relied heavily on the results of inspections which are carried out by both national and local inspectors. In an

earlier version of the mixed-ability grouping policy, the policy texts had already stated that all the processes of the grouping practice should be recorded for inspection (Ministry of Education, 1982). In the 2003 mixed-ability grouping policy implementation plan, the role of the inspection system was re-emphasised and it stressed that the quality of inspection should be enhanced (MOE, 2003b).

Finally, reward and sanction were important instruments utilised both before and after the government enforcing the mixed-ability grouping policy through law. Nonetheless, while the mixed-ability grouping policy was an administrative order, reward and sanction were only applied occasionally and the rules of reward and sanction were constantly being changed (Y-P. Chuang, 2006). It was after the passage of the mixed-ability grouping legislation in 2004 that the rules of reward and sanction were clarified. In the policy texts of the legislation it was confirmed that both the regular evaluation of junior high school principals and the central subsidised funding of local educational authorities were subject to sanction (Compulsory Education Act, 2004).

As suggested by scholars, the choice of policy instruments reveals the ‘assumption about problems and solutions’ (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987, p. 140). In other words, the ‘theory of change’ adopted by an educational policy can be detected by examining the instruments adopted. It can be seen that through utilising mandate, inspection, reward and sanction, the governance of the mixed-ability grouping policy is top-down and centralised. A ‘technical-rational’ assumption is held by the state that the policy process is expected to be linear (Datnow, 2006). From this point of view, changes should occur following the pre-determined directions, the deviation is expected to be solved by reward and sanction, and the conflicts that may shape the implementation towards unanticipated directions are not envisioned.

It should also be noted that through examining the governance of the policy, it is

apparent that the MOE sees the mixed-ability grouping policy more as a reform of grouping practice than a reform of grouping practice and teaching and learning in mixed-ability groups. Although in every version of the mixed-ability grouping policy, the need to make changes to teaching materials and teaching methods was mentioned, it seems that the policy assumes the schools and practitioners already have the capacity to make such changes in mixed-ability groups. Therefore in policy texts, the statement about teaching in mixed-ability groups is short, and there are no instruments adopted for the purpose of supporting and facilitating teaching in mixed-ability groups.

This may be because in Taiwanese educational discourse, teaching and learning has been viewed as being influenced by the centralised curriculum and the joint senior high school entry examination, and while the MOE encountered difficulties with the mixed-ability grouping policy implementation, it focused on reforming the external conditions. The assumption is that with the reform of external conditions such as the joint senior high school entry examination, the teaching in mixed-ability groups would improve. As demonstrated in chapter 4, the ‘junior high school graduates voluntary senior high school entry programme’ was issued under such an assumption. We can see in the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy that the professional discourse concerning teaching and learning in mixed-ability classrooms has been missing.

However, as pointed out by several scholars, mixed-ability grouping is not necessary equal to mixed-ability teaching (Abraham, 2008; Ball, 1981). Also, mixed-ability teaching requires alternative views towards pupils’ learning and the ability to teach in mixed-ability groups (Ireson & Hallam, 2001). It is thus reasonable to infer that it may be naïve to assume that teachers would automatically use mixed-ability teaching in mixed-ability groups, which is an assumption held by the educational authorities in Taiwan while promoting the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy.

To sum up, the prescribed governance of the mixed-ability grouping policy is based on a top-down model that utilises mandate, inspection, reward and sanction for the purpose of creating national conformity. Further, the MOE views the mixed-ability grouping policy more as a change of structure rather than a change of teaching itself therefore the support for improving mixed-ability teaching in mixed-ability groups has been ignored. However, as we will see in later sections, all prescribed governance and policy instruments require the implementation of policy actors who usually hold their own interests based on their different positions; and the translation of ideals into practice is usually complicated because of the contradiction between educational values and various interests.

5.2. The governance of the Ministry of Education

The MOE currently works on several dimensions to facilitate the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy and the officers interviewed indicated that the implementation of the policy relied highly on the attitudes and actions of local educational authorities.

First, the MOE utilises two annual inspections to hold local educational authorities responsible for the practice of the policy—the ‘Annual Integrated Compulsory Education Inspection’, and the ‘General Inspection’. Self-reported surveys are used for the inspections and local educational authorities are mandated to complete them. There are numerous key questions in the surveys such as whether the local educational authorities follow the technical guidelines to organise their pupils, whether the practice of schools in the local educational authority were complained by parents, pupils or even teachers, and whether the local educational authorities punish the related personnel when the alleged violation is validated. The results of the ‘Integrated Compulsory Education Inspection’ can be used to rank all the local educational authorities to represent their educational achievements, which

would also affect the amount of central subsidised funding they receive.

Dealing with complaints is another dimension that the MOE works on. The officers interviewed indicated that there were a high number of complaints with regard to how schools secretly stream pupils, and how schools use resources unequally on different classes. Parents, teachers, various kinds of interest groups and pupils are all sources of complaints. Based on the 'differentiated responsibility', the MOE would transfer the case to the relevant local educational authority first, and the MOE would supervise and inspect the investigation that was being conducted by the local educational authority. However, according to Miss Huang, the administrative officer in charge of the mixed-ability grouping policy in the 4th section of the Department of Compulsory Education, if the problem is shown to be serious and the local educational authority does not provide clear results of their inspections, the MOE would conduct the inspection itself. She stated:

We do not want the hasty and vague inspection reports provided by the local educational authorities. We are aware that some local educational authority may tacitly agree to the violation of the policy. Therefore we sometimes go to schools directly without notifying the local educational authority.

The inspection conducted by the MOE can be described as meticulous and detailed. Several methods were adopted to inspect the practice of schools. The first is interviewing and surveying pupils, teachers, and administrators so the schools' grouping practices can be better understood. The second is to check the average attainment levels of all classes to see if there are any classes that have extremely high average scores. The third is to take a random selection of class registers and to do a roll call in these classes to make sure the school has not been handing in forged registers. If the MOE confirms the violation of the policy, a sanction would be imposed against the school principal and sometimes against the local educational authority if it has attempted to cover the violation up. According to Miss

Huang, it was sometimes obvious that the inspected schools used disguises to cover up the adoption of streaming; and what has been found the most was that schools grouped higher attaining pupils into one or two classes and arranged experienced teachers for them. Also, as setting in maths, science, and English is allowed in the second and the third grades of junior high school education, it has been discovered that some schools secretly used setting in Mandarin and social studies and placed the same pupils in the highest sets for all these subjects.

The MOE has also worked on revising related regulations. According to Director Wu, the discovery of schools using gifted and talented classes to group higher attaining pupils was the reason the MOE re-examined the ‘Special Education Act’ and the ‘Art Education Act’. She stated:

Schools thought that establishing these special classes would help them to recruit higher attaining pupils. However, it wasn't clear whether these classes were established according to the corresponding legislation. That's why we worked with different authorities, such as the special education committee and the department of social education to re-examine these related regulations in order to prevent schools from using loopholes to establish streamed classes.

In 2006, the MOE revised several regulations regarding the establishment of gifted classes. It was decided that maths, language and the general gifted pupils could not be grouped into one ‘fixed’ class during the period of compulsory education. Gifted pupils should mainly be placed in mixed-ability groups and extra resources should be provided by qualified educators in the extra learning hours for the selected gifted pupils. Further, the regulation also prohibits the adoption of the one-time examination result as the only method to select gifted pupils, and the pupils selected for the gifted classes should be in the top 3% in the national evaluation. In 2008, the MOE also revised the regulations regarding what qualifications teachers needed to possess and what equipment was necessary to establish a

gifted and talented class. This was to ensure the quality of the gifted and talented class and to prevent schools from using these classes to group higher attaining pupils for the purpose of boosting their examination scores. At the time of the interview, the MOE was re-examining the regulations regarding the establishment of extra classes. The MOE was aware that schools may use extra classes to boost pupils' academic performance and only provide extra resources for higher attaining pupils. Even though the existing regulations do not allow testing or new materials to be taught in extra school hours, these regulations are in lower-level status with little mandate power over schools. Therefore the MOE was considering elevating the status of the regulations.

Finally, the MOE emphasised that its role is to facilitate the implementation of the policy by helping the local educational authority to establish a sound evaluation system. Thus, it pays attention to the progress of establishing the 'Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy Promotion Committee' in local educational authorities. According to Director Wu, the aim of establishing the 'Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy Promotion Committee' is to help local educational authority to build a workable mechanism. Through this multi-participant committee it is expected that every local educational authority will be more able to facilitate the implementation of the policy. The MOE was aware that there was local resistance towards the mixed-ability grouping policy. Director Wu stated that every local educational authority has its own specific situation within which various attitudes and interests of policy actors intertwine with one another, and the attitude of the local educational authority is usually crucial to the implementation of the policy. She explained:

The attitudes of the local county magistrates and the director of the local educational authorities are crucial. We found that in some counties the magistrates and the directors of the local educational authorities were ambivalent and in some cases they even secretly supported the use of streaming. Therefore, principals are actually receiving mixed signals from different levels of authority.

Nonetheless, how the ‘Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy Committee’ works at the local level is an issue that needs to be further explored. Although the officers interviewed at the MOE emphasised the importance of the committee, they did not provide a clear picture regarding its formal functions or how it exactly works. This lack of clarity is also shown in the related regulations in the mixed-ability grouping legislation that other than emphasising the mandated participants of the committee, exact actions should be taken to ‘promote’ the policy implementation is missing.

To summarise, the actions taken by the MOE can be categorised into two types. The first includes the actions aiming to prevent the violation of the legislation, such as the revision of legislation and the annual inspection, and the other includes the actions taken to deal with the violations, such as the inspection, the reward and the sanction that are adopted when investigating lodged complaints. The rationales of the actions currently taken by the MOE resemble the ‘theory of change’ assumed by the mixed-ability grouping legislation that the policy intends to impose a top-down and linear reform to achieve its objectives—to standardise the adoption of mixed-ability grouping in order to provide equal opportunities. While the MOE is aware of the conflicts, the resolutions they adopt focus more on preventing local educational authorities and schools from violating the policy, rather than on facilitating the use of mixed-ability grouping through building the local educational authorities’ and school’s capacity. The vision of the ‘change’ that should result from the mixed-ability grouping policy is thus limited to the change of grouping practice, but not to the change of teaching and learning in mixed-ability groups.

5.3. Local politics—the governance in Middle Line County and Sunrise County

Two local educational authorities in two counties—Middle Line County and Sunrise

County were researched in this study. The two counties have a history of the officers in local educational authorities and parents publicly resisting the mixed-ability grouping policy. After the passage of the mixed-ability grouping legislation in 2004, the two counties were both reported as utilising the ‘name’ of various special classes, such as gifted classes (in maths, language and general attainment) and talented classes (in art, sports, and music) to group higher attaining pupils without providing adequate resource to these special classes. In this study, the two officers in charge of the mixed-ability grouping policy in the two counties were interviewed to explore the attitudes and the actions of this ‘middle-level’ governing body.

In general, both of the counties faced similar situations, but how they acted as middle-level governing bodies was slightly different due to the attitudes of the local county magistrates, the contradictory interests shown and argued by various policy actors, and also the attitudes and actions of the relevant staff. In the following sections, the situations faced by the two local educational authorities are presented first. This is followed by an explanation of the attitudes and the actions of the two researched local educational authorities.

5.3.1. The situation faced by the local educational authorities

According to both of the officers interviewed, the passage of enforcing the mixed-ability grouping policy through law does facilitate the implementation of the policy. For example, while the mixed-ability grouping legislation states that the procedure of pupil assignment into classes can be executed by either individual schools or by the local educational authority, Middle Line County decided to use a computer programme to randomly assign pupils into classes for all the primary and junior high schools in the county. Sunrise County also adopted the same procedure in 2008. According to Mr. Chen

(pseudonym), the administrative officer at Middle Line County and Miss Hung (pseudonym), the administrative officer at Sunrise County, the centralised, computer-programmed procedure could prevent schools from manipulating pupil assignment in individual schools. Mr. Chen explained that it is because this procedure demonstrates a 'form of fairness' and to a certain degree alleviates the pressure put on individual schools by parents who intend to lobby for the use of streaming. Nonetheless, both of the officers interviewed pointed out that schools still adopted many 'hidden strategies' to stream pupils; and every school in the two counties, 'more or less' adopted several of the following strategies.

The first strategy identified as being adopted was the establishment of special classes, including the gifted class and the talented class. This was a common case between 2004 and 2008 which later led to the revision of related legislation. In the case of establishing gifted classes, both of the local educational authorities found that many schools established them without following the existing regulations with regard to the staff and the equipment required. In the case of establishing talented classes, both Middle Line County and Sunrise County encountered the sudden burgeoning of talented class in junior high schools. In Middle Line County, there were at least 60 special classes established in 40 junior high schools in 2004; and in Sunrise County, 81 special art classes were established in 48 junior high schools in 2005. According to the officers interviewed, junior high schools established a 'Chinese music class', a 'band music class' or other kinds of talented classes as a disguise for grouping higher attaining pupils. Further, although both of the officers interviewed stated that they knew that this was a disguise for higher ability classes, it was also recognised that the local educational authorities in fact supported and encouraged it.

Nonetheless, they indicated that the phenomenon decreased after the relevant legislation was revised. Mr. Chen stated that the regulation that prohibits the grouping of

gifted pupils in the same class has affected parents' interest in sending their children to schools with gifted classes. 'While the demands decrease, the supply also decreases', indicated by Mr. Chen. However, although the regulations regarding the establishment of talented classes have been tightened, both of the officers indicated that most of the talented classes established today still aim to boost pupils' academic performance and it becomes an important 'battle field' that junior high schools participate in.

The second most commonly used strategy that the two case study local educational authorities were aware of is to transfer pupils within schools to group higher attaining pupils. In Sunrise County, there is a local regulation regarding the within-school pupil transference, but it was argued by Miss Hung that schools intentionally manipulate the regulation to group higher attaining pupils. For example, the regulation states that pupils could be transferred to another class if there is a special educational need. Many schools thus argued that some pupils had the 'need' to study in a competitive environment. Miss Hung stated:

We know that schools are clear about the definition of 'special educational needs'. But when the principals intend to violate the regulations, they interpret them based on their own situations.

In Middle Line County, there used to be a within-school pupil transfer regulation. However, Mr. Chen indicated that the new director of the local educational authority abolished the regulation in order to 'give schools more space'. In the junior high schools in Middle Line County, pupil transference is not uncommon. Some of the transfers were to group higher attaining pupils, and others were a response to the requests of influential parents who wanted their children to be placed in specific teachers' classes. Mr Chen stated:

The within-school transfer can sometimes be so secret that most people will not be aware of it. So although this kind of transfer in essence violates the mixed-ability grouping policy, people do not consider it to be as serious as streaming.

The third strategy that the local educational authorities knew about was to extend setting to streaming. In the mixed-ability grouping legislation, setting in English and maths is allowed in the second and third years, and setting in science is allowed in the third year of junior high school education. It was indicated by both of the officers interviewed that schools also used setting in Mandarin and social studies, and the pupils who were in the highest sets in the five subjects were basically the same group of pupils. In some schools, pupils were placed in mixed-ability groups in ‘non-academic’ subjects in the morning, and were then placed in the set classes for the entire afternoon for ‘academic’ subjects. In this case, the schools actually used streaming in the tested subjects because maths, English, science, Mandarin and social studies are the subjects that are tested in the joint senior high school entry examination.

Mr. Chen indicated that the permission to use setting in three academic subjects creates doubts about the regulation. For example, teachers who teach Mandarin and social studies may also want to teach in streamed classes. Further, he pointed out that school educators prefer to keep the same pupils in the same classes to ‘form a united atmosphere’. Therefore, many schools extended setting to ‘academic subject streaming’ to fulfil their own needs but tried to avoid the violation of the mixed-ability grouping policy.

In addition, it should be noted that the two officers interviewed both indicated that some of the strategies mentioned above actually benefit pupils from higher SES families. For example, both of them indicated that pupils in talented classes are usually those who come from higher SES families that have more resources for children to learn specific skills. Thus, questions should be asked about why schools need to provide more resources to boost the academic performance of these pupils. Further, Mr. Chen pointed out that some principals only respond to influential parents, such as those who are members of the school parents’ association or parents who have a relationship with the local county counsellors. He

stated:

I know some principals only make concessions for influential people. If ordinary parents were requesting specific teachers or asking for their children to be transferred to other classes, these principals would refer to the legislation to reject such requests. However, they may respond to influential parents for the purpose of exchanging their support and funding for the school or to avoid being interrogated by local county counsellors.

In short, we can see that the two local educational authorities studied faced similar situations in that schools used various strategies to secretly group higher attaining pupils under the mixed-ability grouping legislation. Although it was pointed out that the scale of secret streaming has shrunk, and the forms of streaming have changed after the mixed-ability grouping policy has been enforced through law in 2004, the intention to ‘take care of higher attaining pupils’ through grouping practice was still quite prominent. It is with this intention that various strategies that utilise the loopholes of the policy have been developed.

5.3.2. The practice of the local educational authorities

Resembling the governance of the MOE, local educational governance of the mixed-ability grouping policy mainly aims to prevent the violation of the policy rather than to facilitate the use of mixed-ability grouping. The assumption is that legislation should bring uniformity, and that the ‘violation’ of the policy should be eliminated through inspection and sanction. Local educational authorities are aware of their role as the middle-level governing body. On the one hand, they are aware of the authority of the mixed-ability grouping legislation, but on the other hand, they develop their own attitudes and strategies to deal with local pressure and the contradictory interests presented by different stakeholders.

In the two researched local educational authorities, local politics has a considerable

impact on the governance of the mixed-ability grouping policy. It was inferred by the two officers interviewed that the officers in the local county government, the local county counsellors, the representatives of the local teachers' association or local parents' association, along with parents, teachers, and pupils are all actors who try to influence the practice of the policy. Some of them support the policy, some of them resist the policy, and also many of them try to gain benefits by special arrangement. Miss Hung in Sunrise County stated:

Many people try to argue, to offer their interpretation, and to influence the actions of local educational authority.

For example, as was indicated by Mr. Chen, every year in May, local county counsellors would send a 'pupil list' to the Middle Line local educational authority to request that these pupils be placed in special groups. There were also arguments saying that since many schools violate the policy, the local educational authority should just skip the inspections required by the legislation. Under the circumstances, it has been found that the 'balance' created by the two local educational authorities studied among various pressures and interests was only to deal with complaints made by the public instead of conducting regular inspections or policy promotion.

According to Mr. Chen, the attitude of Middle Line's educational authority is that as long as the local educational authority fulfils its responsibility in procedural tasks, the detailed procedures conducted in schools, even if they are questionable, would not be scrutinised closely. Mr. Chen stated:

As long as the grouping practice in schools does not result in any complaints, the local educational authority would not investigate whether they are violating the policy. Further, inspectors tend to play down the seriousness of most of the cases in our county.

Also, in Sunrise County, Miss Hung indicated that as long as no complaints are

received, the local educational authority would not interfere with the grouping practice adopted by schools. Miss Hung also pointed out that there is a tendency for inspectors to downplay cases of violation in official reports because inspectors want to ‘protect’ local schools from the sanctions imposed by the legislation.

Nonetheless, because the mixed-ability grouping policy is a national level policy, various stakeholders would lodge complaints to either the MOE or to the local educational authorities about the violation of the policy. These are the cases that the local educational authorities have to respond to under the demands of the legislation and also the supervision of the public.

When asked about how local educational authorities deal with the complaints, it was found that although both of the two local educational authorities intended to ‘protect’ local schools, the degree of cover up was different, which may result from the attitudes of the local magistrates and the personal attitudes of the administrative officers.

In Sunrise County, although the local magistrate used to contend that schools should be allowed to establish an art talented class, he did not oppose the mixed-ability grouping legislation publicly. The local educational authority also insists that the complaints filed by parents should be inspected carefully. Miss Hung, the administrative officer in charge of the mixed-ability grouping policy, is usually the person who receives the complaints first. She described herself as a believer in mixed-ability grouping teaching and fully recognised the advantages of the mixed-ability grouping policy. In dealing with a complaint, she usually started by collecting relevant information, and then assisting the inspector to conduct inspections. The inspectors at Sunrise County usually invited Miss Hung to participate in the visits to schools. Miss Hung explained:

We need to collect different kinds of information and then compare them to find out how schools manipulate grouping practice. You need to be familiar with all the strategies to

know which directions to look in. That's why inspectors often invite me to go to schools with them.

Further, although the local educational authority in Sunrise County does not inspect the schools regularly, it still pays attention to the schools that are rumoured to be violating the policy. A mechanism has been established in Sunrise which is that instead of sending an inspector to these suspicious schools, they send members of the 'Mixed-ability Grouping Policy Promotion Committee' first to collect information. According to Miss Hung, although there is an unspoken consensus that the local educational authorities normally ignore the majority of minor violations, the local educational authority will take action if the violation is serious. Moreover, sanctions are applied accordingly in Sunrise County, which is not the case in many other counties. Miss Hung indicated that the local educational authority does apply a sanction if the schools keep violating the legislation after they have been warned repeatedly.

On the contrary, in Middle Line County, the local educational authority seems to hold a passive attitude towards the governance of the mixed-ability grouping policy. According to Mr. Chen, the magistrate of Middle Line County and the director of the local educational authority are more suspicious of the mixed-ability grouping policy compared to the previous magistrate. Therefore some of the mechanisms established before to inspect and to facilitate the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy were abolished. As mentioned above, inspectors in Middle Line County tended to cover up or helped to explain instances where schools have violated the policy. Further, the 'Mixed-ability Grouping Policy Promotion Committee' in Middle Line County has not been functioning at all for it is not valued by the local educational authority.

It is apparent that under the expectation of creating conformity through only orders, the governance of the policy in local educational authorities is limited to dealing with violations,

which is similar to the governance of the MOE. However, as demonstrated above, local politics, which involves various interests and influences, has affected the attitudes and the actions of the researched local educational authorities. The two researched local educational authorities, on the one hand, provide a considerable space for schools to manipulate the grouping practice but, on the other hand, they follow the mixed-ability grouping legislation by dealing with violation complaints. Both of the local educational authorities indicated that there was no ‘promotion’ of the policy, and that the focus of the policy was on the ‘grouping practice’, not teaching and learning within mixed-ability groups.

5.4. Discussion and Summary

In this chapter I have attempted to demonstrate the governance of the policy in both the central educational authority and the local educational authorities.

It can be seen that through enforcing the mixed-ability grouping policy through law and the establishment of the detailed guidelines and sanction system, the governance of the policy focuses on dealing with violation in a top-down manner. However, the authority of the educational authorities is unstable. On the surface, the authority is strongly based on the mandate and the ‘sanction’ applied on the evaluation of principals or on the funding provided by the MOE to local educational authorities. Yet, in practice the authority is handled tacitly in the local policy arena where stakeholders can exercise their contrasting influences.

The question should be further asked is that ‘who are the stakeholders that usually get what they want?’ According to the officers interviewed in this study, those who gain benefits from the schools are the ones who can influence school funding, who help increase the senior high school entry rate of schools, and who have connections with local officers or local counsellors. Higher attaining pupils are usually the ones who benefit from these tactics

that while they are placed in special groups with extra resource, the lower attaining pupils are provided with lower expectation and less extra help. Further, it can be seen that schools also benefit from utilising these tactics. Schools may on the one hand, gain a reputation from the performance of the higher attaining pupils and, on the other hand, they may be able to build relationships with the influential policy actors. In this case, the 'space' the local educational authorities create for schools to manipulate grouping practice is for schools to act in the interests of the advantaged pupils and parents, rather than to make professional judgements in regard to teaching and learning in mixed-ability groups.

Chapter 6 : The attitudes and the perceptions of the mixed-ability grouping policy of school principals: questionnaire survey results

6.1. Introduction

Within the long process of the mixed-ability grouping policy, various arguments that either support or question the policy constantly appeared in media reports, official announcements and lobbying documents. However, only a few Taiwanese studies focus on systematically understanding policy actors' perceptions towards these arguments or exploring the concrete meaning of these arguments in depth, particularly after the mixed-ability grouping policy has been enforced through law, which intends to endow the mixed-ability grouping policy with stronger authority by changing its status.

As introduced in the research method chapter, this study intends to explore the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy by considering the perceptions and actions of policy actors on different levels. On a local level, other than interviewing officers in local educational authorities and educators in two schools, the questionnaire survey of principals in the two targeted counties was designed to gain a more holistic understanding of the practice of the policy in given counties.

The role of the principal in school reform and educational change has been discussed extensively (Ball, 1982; Fullan, 2001; Loveless, 1999). In the research area of educational change, scholars indicated that principals are crucial in promoting or preventing change (Fullan, 2001; Rose, 2007). In Taiwanese schools, principals usually coordinate school administrators, teachers and parents. Further, within the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan, junior high school principals are endowed with the main

responsibility of implementing the policy in schools. The evaluation of the principals' performance will be influenced by the policy implementation (Regulations of the Mixed-ability Grouping and Ability Grouping Policy in Primary and Junior High schools, 2005). All the above reasons make the principal in junior high schools in Taiwan the key person who could provide abundant information with regard to the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy. This survey thus aimed at investigating principals to gain understandings of the attitudes and actions of different policy actors within schools, and to learn about the actions taken by junior high schools in reaction to the mixed-ability grouping policy.

6.2. Sample

The questionnaires³⁵ were distributed to all junior high school principals in Middle Line County and Sunrise County. There are a total of 90 junior high schools in these two counties. 54 principals responded to the survey which is a 60% total response rate. For each county, the response rate was 57.1% in Sunrise County and 63.4% in Middle Line County.

6.3. Findings

6.3.1. Attitudes towards the advantages and the disadvantages of the mixed-ability grouping policy

Part of the questionnaire included questions regarding principals' own attitudes towards the advantages and disadvantages of the mixed-ability grouping policy and principals' understanding of other policy actors' attitudes. The advantages and disadvantages of the mixed-ability grouping policy were identified through a documentary analysis of existing official documents, media reports, lobbying documents of various interest groups and

³⁵ See questionnaire in Appendix 4.

several research studies. They are listed as follows and respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with the statements.

1. It increases pupils' overall confidence in learning
2. Pupils with lower academic abilities lose confidence in learning in mixed-ability classes.
3. It increases pupils' overall attainments
4. It decreases pupils' overall attainments
5. Pupils with higher academic abilities feel bored in mixed-ability classes.
6. It infringes on pupils' chances of entering a better senior high school.
7. It normalises the school teaching (rather than teaching to test).
8. It makes teaching more difficult.
9. It equalises the distribution of educational resources.
10. It goes against parents' preference for streaming.

6.3.1.1 Principals' attitudes

When asked about the influence of the mixed-ability grouping policy, most of the responding principals in the two counties agreed that the policy does have a positive influence. 57.7% of the responding principals in Middle Line and 53.6% in Sunrise strongly agreed or agreed that using mixed-ability grouping helped to increase pupils' confidence in learning. 69.2% of the responding principals in Middle Line and 60.7% in Sunrise strongly agreed or agreed that the policy helped to equalise the distribution of educational resources, and 61.6% in Middle Line and 82.1% in Sunrise responded that the policy helped to normalises school teaching.

However, when asked about the influences related to pupils' attainments, principals' attitudes varied. In Middle Line, only 23.1% of the responding principals agreed that this policy would improve pupils' attainment and about 34% of them strongly agreed or agreed

that the policy would decrease pupils' overall attainments. In both of the two questions, about 30% of the responding principals had a neutral attitude. The responding principals in Sunrise held a more suspicious attitude toward the positive effects of using mixed-ability grouping on pupils' attainments. 53.5% of the responding principals disagreed or strongly disagreed that the policy would increase pupils' overall attainments and 46.4% of the responding principals suggested that the policy would decrease pupils' overall attainments.

There was also a sense that pupils with higher academic abilities might feel bored in mixed-ability groups. 73.1% of the responding principals in Middle Line and 80.6% of the responding principals in Sunrise strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. In addition, in both of the two counties, the majority of the responding principals, 76.9% in Middle Line and 85.7% in Sunrise, strongly agreed or agreed that the policy went against parents' preferences.

Table 12: The principals' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy

Middle Line County N=26, Sunrise County N=28		
Statements	Middle Line	Sunrise
	Strongly agree or agree	
1) It increases pupils' overall confidence of learning	57.7% (15)	53.6% (15)
2) Pupils with lower academic abilities lose confidence in learning in mixed-ability classes	15.4% (4)	10.7% (3)
3) It increases pupils' overall attainments	23.1% (6)	28.6% (8)
4) It decreases pupils' overall attainment	34% (9)	46.6% (13)
5) Pupils with higher academic abilities feel bored in mixed-ability classes.	73.1% (19)	80.6% (22)
6) It infringes on pupils' chances of entering a better high school.	34.6% (9)	44.4% (12)
7) It normalises the school teaching (rather than teaching to test).	61.6% (16)	82.1% (23)
8) It makes teaching more difficult.	64% (16)	67.8% (19)
9) It equalises the distribution of educational resources.	69.2% (18)	60.7% (17)
10) It goes against parents' preference for streaming.	76.9% (20)	85.7% (24)

6.3.1.2 Teachers' attitude

According to the response of the surveying principals, teachers' attitudes towards the policy were similar to their own. The principals in the two counties indicated that teachers regularly mentioned the following positive influences of the mixed-ability grouping policy—increasing pupils' confidence in learning, normalising school teaching, and equalising the distribution of educational resources.

However, the majority of the surveyed principals also indicated that teachers often and sometimes mentioned several negative aspects about the barriers of implementation. These include: a decrease in pupils' attainments due to the implementation of the policy (Middle Line, 69.3%; Sunrise, 60.7%), it infringes on pupils' changes of entering a better high school (Middle Line: 64%; Sunrise: 75%), pupils with higher academic abilities feel bored (Middle Line, 73.1%; Sunrise, 85.8%), it is becoming increasingly difficult to teach (Middle Line: 76.9%; Sunrise: 89.3%), and parents are sceptical about the policy (Middle Line: 77%; Sunrise: 92.8%).

In other words, it can be found that although principals and teachers recognised the positive effects of the mixed-ability grouping policy, they were concerned about pupils' attainments, the more academically able pupils' education, the degree of difficulty in teaching and parents' preferences.

Table 13: Principals' understanding of teachers' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy

Middle Line County N=26, Sunrise County N=28		
Statements	Middle Line	Sunrise
	Mentioned (often/sometimes)	Mentioned (often/sometimes)
1) It increases pupils' overall confidence of learning	61.6% (16)	59.2% (16)
2) Pupils with lower academic abilities lose confidence in learning in mixed-ability classes	26.9% (7)	28.5% (8)
3) It increases pupils' overall attainments	42.3% (11)	39.3% (11)
4) It decreases pupils' overall attainment	69.3% (18)	60.7% (17)
5) Pupils with higher academic abilities feel bored in mixed-ability classes.	73.1% (19)	85.8% (24)
6) It infringes on pupils' chances of entering a better high school.	64% (16)	75% (21)
7) It normalises the school teaching (rather than teaching to test).	65.4% (17)	71.4% (20)
8) It makes teaching more difficult.	76.9% (20)	89.3% (25)
9) It equalises the distribution of educational resources.	65.2% (17)	57.2% (16)
10) It goes against parents' preference for streaming.	77% (20)	92.8% (26)

6.3.1.3 Parent's opinions

Parents' most argued viewpoints about the mixed-ability grouping policy indicated by the responded principals included "to teach pupils with different abilities in streamed classes is more rational" (Middle Line: 92.3%; Sunrise: 92.8%), "mixed-ability grouping will decrease pupils' opportunities to enter a better high school" (Middle Line: 92.3%; Sunrise: 82.2%), and "pupils with better abilities shouldn't be sacrificed by mixed-ability grouping" (Middle Line: 92.3%; Sunrise: 89.3%).

Fewer principals indicated that parents mentioned, "less able pupils should have more

support.” Only 50% of the responding principals in Middle Line and 46.5% in Sunrise were often or sometimes presented with these arguments.

Principals also indicated that parents used the following arguments to persuade schools to adopt streaming. 80% of the responding principals in Middle Line and 67.8% in Sunrise pointed out that they often or sometimes heard parents argue that “other schools use streaming” and 68% of the responding principals in Middle Line and 60.7% in Sunrise often or sometimes heard parents say that they would transfer their children out of the school if the school did not start using streaming.

It was also found that almost every responding principal had encountered parents’ requests for pupils to be re-streamed or for pupils to be grouped by attainments. In Middle Line County, all the responding principals indicated that parents have requested that their children be streamed; 26.9% of them indicated that most parents have requested this, 19.2% of them indicated that about half of the parents have requested this and 53.8% of them stated that few parents have requested this. In Sunrise County, 25% of the responding principals indicated that most parents have requested this, 10.7% of them indicated that about half of the parents have requested this and 60.7% of them stated that few parents have asked the school to use streaming. On the other hand, while being asked that if parent’s questioning of the policy hinders the policy implementation, the majority of the responding principals in Middle Line County and Sunrise County indicated that parents’ questioning did have negative influence on policy implementation (Middle Line, 57.6%; Sunrise: 62.9%). In short, although in the majority of schools only a few parents have asked the schools to use streaming, their opinions regarding the education of the more academically able pupils and the senior high school entry rate were made clear to the responding principals and the principals considered parent’ opinions and actions as barriers to policy implementation.

Table 14: Principals' understanding of parents' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy

Middle Line County N=26, Sunrise County N=28		
Statements	Middle Line	Sunrise
	Mentioned (often/sometimes)	Mentioned (often/sometimes)
1) To teach pupils with different abilities in streamed classes is more rational	92.3% (24)	92.8% (26)
2) Pupils with better ability shouldn't be sacrificed in mixed-ability groups	92.3% (24)	89.3% (25)
3) Less able pupils should obtain more support	50% (13)	46.5% (13)
4) Mixed-ability grouping will decrease pupil's opportunity to enter a better senior high school	92.3% (24)	82.2% (23)
5) Mixed-ability grouping will increase behaviour problems	26.9% (7)	28.6% (8)
6) Other schools use streaming	80% (20)	67.8% (19)
7) Will transfer pupils out of school if the school does not use streaming	68% (17)	60.7% (17)

6.3.2. The recommended grouping practice

Although the mixed-ability grouping policy clearly states that the methods of grouping practice could be adopted in schools, school educators and parents seem to constantly infer that schools should adopt other forms of grouping practice. The items listed in this question were extracted from existing surveys and disputes about the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy. Principals were asked whether there were teachers and parents proposing the following grouping practices to replace the statutory mixed-ability grouping. The grouping practices list included:

1. Use streaming in every grade.
2. Use banding.

3. All of the five main subjects should be taught in set classes.
4. Establish extra classes for students with higher attainments.
5. Establish extra classes for students with lower attainments.
6. Start setting in the first year of junior high school rather than only in the 2nd and 3rd grades.
7. Do not use setting in any subject or grade.
8. Establish different kinds of gifted or talented classes.
9. Other, please specify_____

6.3.2.1 The grouping practices recommended by school teachers

More than half of the responding principals in the two counties indicated that teachers had proposed various methods to group pupils. 57.7% of the responding principals in Middle Line and 64.3% in Sunrise indicated that there were aware that teachers suggested that streaming should be used in every grade; 76.9% of the responding principals in Middle Line and 53.6% in Sunrise indicated that teachers used to propose that ‘all of the five main subjects should be taught in set classes.’ Also, 65.4% of the responding principals in Middle Line and 57.1% in Sunrise indicated that teachers proposed to ‘establish extra classes for pupils with higher academic attainments’, and 50% of the responding principals in Middle Line and 57.1% in Sunrise indicated to ‘establish extra classes for pupils with lower academic attainments’ was proposed by teachers. Fewer principals encountered the suggestion that schools shouldn’t use any setting in any of the subjects or grades (Middle Line: 11.5%; Sunrise: 14.3%). In addition, about half of the principals in the two counties reported that teachers used to advise that different kinds of gifted classes should be established (Middle Line: 46.2%; Sunrise: 57.1%). Principals’ responses suggest that homogeneous groups are still supported by many teachers.

Table 15: Have the principals ever heard teachers proposed the following practices?

Middle Line County N=26, Sunrise County N=28		
Grouping practice	Middle Line	Sunrise
	Yes	Yes
1) Use streaming in every grade.	57.7% (15)	64.3% (18)
2) Use banding	50% (13)	25% (7)
3) All of the five main subjects should be taught in classes that have been grouped by level of ability.	76.9% (20)	53.6% (15)
4) Establish extra classes for students with higher attainments.	65.4% (17)	57.1% (16)
5) Establish extra classes for students with lower attainments	50.% (13)	57.1% (16)
6) Start setting in the first year of junior high school rather than only in the 2nd and 3rd grades.	26.9% (7)	35.7% (10)
7) Do not use setting in any subject or grade.	11.5% (3)	14.3% (4)
8) Establish different kinds of gifted or talented classes.	46.2% (12)	57.1% (16)

6.3.2.2 The grouping practices recommended by parents

80.8% of the responding principals in Middle Line County and 85.7% in Sunrise County inferred that they encountered parents who requested streaming to be used in every grade. Fewer responding principals stated that parents suggested establishing extra classes for better academically achieving pupils, 69.2% of the responding principals in Middle Line County, and 67.9% in Sunrise County used to hear this argument. Other requests that the majority of principals have heard from parents included the desire for gifted classes to be established (Middle Line: 65.4%; Sunrise: 64.3%) and that all of the five main subjects should be taught in set classes (Middle Line: 65.4%; Sunrise: 50%). Fewer principals have heard parents state that schools should provide extra lessons for less academically able pupils (Middle Line: 42.3%; Sunrise: 57.1%).

Table 16: Have the principals ever heard parents proposed the following practices?

Middle Line County N=26, Sunrise County N=28		
Grouping practice	Middle Line	Sunrise
	Yes	Yes
1) Use streaming in every grade.	80.8% (21)	85.7% (24)
2) Use banding	46.2% (12)	10.7% (3)
3) All of the five main subjects should be taught in classes that have been grouped by level of ability.	65.4% (17)	50% (14)
4) Establish extra classes for students with higher academic attainments.	69.2% (18)	67.9% (19)
5) Establish extra classes for students with lower academic attainments	42.3% (11)	57.1% (16)
6) Start setting in the first year of junior high school rather than only in the 2nd and 3rd grades.	46.2% (12)	32.1% (9)
7) Do not use setting in any subject or grade.	0% (0)	7.1% (2)
8) Establish different kinds of gifted or talented classes.	65.4% (17)	64.3% (18)

6.3.3. Teaching in mixed-ability groups

The questions regarding the teaching in mixed-ability groups were also extracted from existing disputes and prior research (Ball, 1981; Liu, S-F., 2004; Reid et al., 1981). Both the advantages and disadvantages of teaching in mixed-ability groups were listed as follows:

1. Decreases the efficiency of teaching.
2. It is difficult to design lesson plans that are suitable for pupils of varying abilities.
3. Mixed-ability grouping increases the variety of teaching in classrooms.
4. It will be difficult to manage classroom discipline.
5. The current class size is too large for mixed-ability teaching.
6. Mixed-ability grouping will enhance cooperative learning.
7. There are only a few opportunities for teachers to learn about and discuss mixed-ability teaching.
8. Mixed-ability grouping increases the amount of class preparation.

9. Other, please specify_____

The most frequently heard difficulty in teaching in mixed-ability classrooms by responding principals was that ‘it is difficult to design lesson plans that are suitable for pupils of varying abilities’. In Middle Line County, 80.8% of the responding principals often or sometimes heard this kind of argument. In Sunrise County, 78.6% of the responding principals also often or sometimes heard teachers mention this point.

Further, more than half of the responding principals in the two counties often or sometimes heard teachers suggest that mixed-ability grouping decreases the efficiency of teaching. 50% of the responding principals in Middle Line County and 57.2% in Sunrise County indicated that they often or sometimes heard this argument.

Not many of the responding principals in the two counties indicated that they heard teachers argue that class size was a problem in the practice of the policy. Only 34.6% of the responding principals in Middle Line County and 39.3% in Sunrise County suggested that they often or sometimes heard this argument.

As for the possible positive influence of using mixed-ability grouping in teaching, the responding principals indicated that they heard teachers say that the use of mixed-ability grouping would help them develop cooperative learning (46.2% in Middle Line County; 46.4% in Sunrise County). Fewer of the responding principals indicated that they heard teachers infer that using mixed-ability grouping would increase the variety of teaching (30.7% in Middle Line County; 18.5% in Sunrise County).

Table 17: Principals' understanding of teachers' opinions about teaching in mixed-ability groups

Middle Line County N=26, Sunrise County N=28		
Statements	Middle Line	Sunrise
	Mentioned (often/sometimes)	Mentioned (often/sometimes)
1) Decreases the efficiency of teaching.	50% (13)	57.2% (16)
2) It is difficult to design lesson plans that are suitable for pupils of varying abilities.	80.8% (21)	78.6% (22)
3) Mixed-ability grouping increases the variety of teaching in classrooms.	30.7% (8)	18.5% (5)
4) It will be difficult to manage classroom discipline.	42.3% (11)	35.7% (10)
5) The current class size is too large for mixed-ability teaching.	34.6% (9)	39.3% (11)
6) Mixed-ability grouping will enhance cooperative learning.	46.2% (11)	46.4% (13)
7) There are only a few opportunities for teachers to learn about and discuss mixed-ability teaching.	30.7% (8)	28.6% (8)
8) Increases the amount of class preparation.	42.3% (11)	35.7% (10)

6.3.4. The practice of schools

6.3.4.1 The grouping practice in schools

The contradictory results of the schools' practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy between the official inspection and the survey conducted by the interest groups have generated doubts about the 'real' practice of schools (Y-P. Chuang, 2006; Y-H. Hsu, 2006a; Y-H. Hsu, 2006b; HEF, 2002, 2003a, 2008). The contradictory results can be explained as follows, whilst the surveys conducted by the interest groups have usually focused on the details and the complexity of the grouping practice adopted in schools, the official inspections usually used a simple indicator — a yes or no question for schools to respond to.

The survey in this study thus utilised information about the complicated grouping practices that were discovered by the interest groups to find out whether the surveyed schools employed a variety of grouping practices. Nonetheless, bearing in mind that some of the grouping practices indicated by pupils or teachers are in fact ‘illegal’ under the mixed-ability grouping legislation, not all of the discovered grouping practices were listed in these questions. The listed methods of grouping practices are as follows:

1. Use mixed-ability grouping in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades, no setting of subjects applied³⁶.
2. Use mixed-ability grouping in the 2nd and 3rd grades. Use vocational and academic banding in the 3rd grade.
3. Use mixed-ability grouping in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades, use setting in certain subjects in the 2nd and 3rd grades.
4. Establish gifted classes for English, maths and science.
5. Establish gifted classes for music or art.
6. Establish gifted classes for PE.
7. Use setting in vacation extra classes or after-school extra classes
8. Use streaming in vacation extra classes or after-school extra classes
9. Other, please specify_____

As suggested earlier, the mixed-ability grouping policy states that schools should use mixed-ability grouping for all three grades in junior high schools. Setting in maths and English is allowed in the second grade and setting in science, maths and English is allowed in the third grade. 33.3% of the responding principals in Middle Line County and 53.6% of the schools in Sunrise County reported that they followed the policy accordingly. Some principals reported that their schools only used mixed-ability grouping without using setting

³⁶ The 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades in junior high school are also called as the 7th, 8th, and 9th grades in the compulsory level education.

in all three grades (Middle Line County, 50%; Sunrise County 28.6%).

However, other kinds of grouping practice were used constantly. Some schools established after-school classes and winter/summer vacation classes to teach academic subjects using setting or streaming. 19.2% of the responding principals in Middle Line and 25% in Sunrise indicated that they used streaming in these extra classes. About half of the responding principals in both the two counties reported that they used setting in these extra classes (Middle Line: 53.8%; Sunrise: 46.4%).

Also, it was not uncommon to establish different kinds of 'gifted classes'. In Middle Line County, 34.6% of the surveyed schools established a maths or English gifted class, 11.5% of the responding schools established an art-related gifted class and 38.5% of the responding schools established a PE gifted class. In Sunrise, 25% of the surveyed schools established a maths or English gifted class, 35.7% of them established an art gifted class, and 32.1% of them established a PE gifted class.

Table 18: The grouping practice adopted in the schools

Middle Line County N=26, Sunrise County N=28		
Forms of grouping practice	Middle Line	Sunrise
Use mixed-ability grouping in the 1 st , 2 nd and 3 rd grades, no setting of subjects applied	50% (13)	28.6% (8)
Use mixed-ability grouping in the 2 nd and 3 rd grades. Use vocational and academic banding in the 3 rd grade.	23.1% (6)	28.6% (8)
Use mixed-ability grouping in the 1 st , 2 nd and 3 rd grades, use setting in certain subjects in the 2 nd and 3 rd grades.	33.3% (8)	53.6% (15)
Establish gifted classes for English, maths and science.	34.6% (9)	25% (7)
Establish gifted classes for music or art.	11.5% (3)	35.7% (10)
Establish gifted classes for PE.	38.5% (10)	32.1% (9)
Use setting in vacation extra classes or after-school extra classes	53.8% (14)	46.4% (13)
Use streaming in vacation extra classes or after-school extra classes	19.2% (5)	25% (7)

6.3.4.2 Do other schools use streaming?

When asked directly whether any of the schools in the county used streaming based on principals' understanding, 23.1% of the responding principals in Middle Line County indicated that some of the schools used streaming. 46.4% of the responding principals in Sunrise indicated that some of the schools were still using streaming.

Table 19: Do other schools use streaming?

Middle Line/N=26 Sunrise/N=28		
County	Middle Line	Sunrise
1) All of them have adopted the mixed-ability grouping policy	50.0% (13)	28.6% (8)
2) Some of them use streaming	23.1% (6)	46.4% (13)
3) Most of them use streaming	7.7% (2)	3.6% (1)
4) All of them use streaming	0.0% (0)	3.6% (1)
5) Other, please specify (Not sure)_____	19.2% (5)	17.9% (5)

6.3.4.3 Does the argument that 'some schools establish gifted classes to group better attaining pupils' match the real phenomenon in schools in your county?

It has been argued by interest groups, including parents' and teachers' groups and civil educational reform groups that some schools establish gifted classes to group the better attaining pupils in order to boost their grades (HEF, 2003; National Teachers' Association, 2006). A recent small-scale qualitative study also indicated that the talented classes established in junior high schools were actually the classes for pupils who were only expected to perform well academically rather than ones focusing on developing pupils' special talents (Y-H. Hsu, 2006a; Y-H. Hsu, 2006b). This survey thus tried to learn about school principals' understanding about the phenomenon.

In Middle Line County, 46.2% of the responding principals suggested that some

schools or many schools used gifted or talented classes to camouflage the traditional higher ability groups. In Sunrise County, about 75% of the responding principals indicated that some schools or many schools used gifted or talented classes to group more academically able pupils. The results of this study confirmed the argument put forward by interest groups and researchers.

6.3.4.4 Why do schools establish gifted classes?

In answering questions about why junior high schools establish gifted or talented classes, most of the responding principals cited that the reason was to “attract gifted pupils to enrol” (Middle Line: 92.3%; Sunrise: 89.3%). “To discover gifted pupils in schools” was also an important factor that schools considered when deciding whether to establish gifted classes (Middle Line: 76.9%; Sunrise: 82.1%).

In both counties, over 50% of the responding principals thought that establishing gifted classes would provide pupils with adequate education (Middle Line: 50%; Sunrise: 53.6%). Fewer principals in Middle Line County and Sunrise County indicated that they established gifted classes because they were requested by parents (Middle Line: 38.5%; Sunrise: 46.4%).

Table 20: Why do schools establish gifted class?

Middle Line/N=26 Sunrise/N=28		
County	Middle Line	Sunrise
1) To discover gifted pupils	76.9% (20)	82.1% (23)
2) To group gifted pupils in order to provide adequate education	50.0% (13)	53.6% (15)
3) To attract pupils with different gifts	92.3% (24)	89.3% (25)
4) Because other schools establish gifted classes	26.9% (7)	25.0% (7)
5) Due to parents' request	38.5 % (10)	46.4% (13)
6) Other, please specify (Not sure)_____	0% (0)	0% (0)

6.3.5. The barriers to implementation

Out of the barriers that have been alleged to hinder the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy, the influence of the senior high school entry system and examination was ranked as the most important barrier in the two surveyed counties. The second most important barrier was ‘pressure from parents’; and the least important barrier identified was the evaluation system of the local educational authority. In relation to this, the responding principals in the two surveyed counties ranked the alleged barriers in almost the same way.

Table 21: The barriers to the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy
(Question asked: How would you rate the importance of these aspects that may hinder the practice of the policy? Please rank in order of importance (i.e. 1, 2, 3 etc.)

	Mean=		Rank
County (M=Middle Line; S=Sunrise)	M	S	
1) School educators’ disputes over the rationales of the policy	4.08	4.52	5
2) Difficulty in teaching in mixed-ability classrooms	3.61	3.36	3
3) Pressure from parents	2.65	2.19	2
4) Influence of the senior high school entry system and examination	1.83	1.62	1
5) Other schools still use streaming	3.79	3.81	4
6) The assessment of the local educational authority is not functioning	5.05	4.79	6
7) Other, please specify_____			

However, when asked about the importance of the factors that may improve the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy, the opinions of the responding principals in the two counties were slightly different.

In Middle Line County, the most important factor chosen as a way of improving the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy was that ‘the procedure of grouping pupils should be controlled by local educational authorities rather than by individual schools’.

The argument is that as long as the local educational authority controls the assignment of pupils into classes for schools, individual schools will not be pressurised by parents to stream pupils. Also in Middle Line, the second and the third most important factors chosen by the responding principals were ‘initiate 12-year compulsory education’ and ‘abolish the senior high school entry examination’. ‘Improve the communication with parents about the mixed-ability grouping policy’ and ‘improve the quality of evaluation conducted by the local educational authority’ were ranked as the least important factors by the responding principals in Middle Line.

In Sunrise County, the responding principals ranked ‘abolish the senior high school entrance examination’ as the most important factor that may improve the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy, and the second most important factor as ‘initiate 12-year compulsory education.’ Contrary to Middle Line County, the responding principals in Sunrise County ranked ‘the procedure of grouping pupils should be controlled by the local educational authority rather than by individual schools’ as the second least important factor that may improve the practice of the policy. The least important factor was also ‘improve the quality of evaluation conducted by the local educational authority’.

It can be seen that the responding principals viewed the barriers that relate to the wider educational contexts as being more influential to the policy implementation than the barriers that may be generated within schools or by policy actors.

Table 22: How can the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy be improved?

	Mean=		Ranking	
County (M=Middle Line; S=Sunrise)	M		S	
1) Initiate 12-year compulsory education	3.63	2	2.24	2
2) Abolish the senior high school entry examination	3.64	3	1.79	1
3) Cut class sizes	4.56	6	4.39	4
4) Improve schools' ability to gain parents' support of the policy	4.40	5	4.00	3
5) Provide training so teachers have the ability to teach mixed-ability groups	4.31	4	4.75	5
6) Schools should improve their communication with parents about the mixed-ability grouping policy	5.16	7	5.38	6
7) The procedure of grouping pupils should be controlled by the local educational authority rather than by individual schools	3.50	1	5.71	7
8) Improve the quality of the assessment conducted by the local educational authority	6.04	8	5.91	8
9) Other, please specify _____				

*How would you rate the importance of these factors that may improve the practice of the mixed-ability policy?

Please rank in order of importance (i.e. 1, 2, 3 etc.)

6.3.6. The influence of the senior high school entry system

How does the current senior high school entry system affect the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy? The following questions regarding the alleged influences of the current senior high school entry system were asked in the questionnaire:

1. Parents request streaming in order to increase their children's chance of entering a better senior high school.
2. The schools want to provide streamed classes for students who have a higher chance of entering better senior high schools.
3. The senior high school entry rate affects a school's reputation; using streaming may increase pupils' chance of entering a better senior high school.
4. The senior high school entry rate affects the enrolment of a school. Schools need to use

streaming to encourage pupils to enrol.

5. The senior high school entry system still emphasises students' attainments, which will influence teachers' willingness to teach in a mixed-ability classroom.
6. The senior high school entry system is more flexible now, which will facilitate the practice of mixed-ability grouping.
7. The testing questions in the senior high school entry examination now focus on basic ability, which makes teachers more likely to want to teach in mixed-ability classrooms.
8. No influence.
9. Other, please specify_____

In the two surveyed counties, the majority of the responding principals indicated that parents' requests for streaming to be used in order to increase the opportunity for pupils to enter the best senior high school was the main form of pressure that resulted from the senior high school entry system. 80% of the responding principals in Middle Line County and 96.4% of the responding principals in Sunrise County agreed with the statement.

The principals also indicated that schools were eager to group more academically able pupils in the hope that these pupils would gain better scores in the senior high school entry examination. 68% of Middle Line County's responding principals and 89.3% of Sunrise's responding principals agreed with this statement.

Furthermore, more than 60% of the principals in the two counties indicated that pupils' performance in the senior high school entry examination would affect future pupil enrolments (Middle Line County: 64%; Sunrise County: 75%). 48% of the responding principals in Middle Line and 71.4% of the responding principals in Sunrise indicated that the senior high school entry rate of schools would affect parents' impressions of the schools' reputation.

Questions regarding the influence of the recent senior high school entry system reform

on the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy were also asked in the questionnaire. As suggested earlier, the reform intended to expand the pathways for pupils to enter senior high schools; it also simplified the content of the examination and expanded the provision of various senior high schools. It was found that only a few principals recognised the alleged changes in the reform. 44% of Middle Line County's responding principals and 53.6% of Sunrise County's responding principals suggested that the new senior high school entry system still emphasised pupils' academic performance; only 28% of the responding principals in Middle Line, and 17.9% in Sunrise agreed that the system was more flexible and only 28% of the responding principals in Middle Line and 14.3 % in Sunrise agreed that the simplified examination would encourage mixed-ability group teaching.

Table 23: The influence of the senior high school entry system

Middle Line N=25 /Sunrise N=28		
Influences	Middle Line	Sunrise
1) Parents request streaming in order to increase their children's chance of entering a better high school.	80% (20)	96.4% (27)
2) The schools want to provide streamed classes for students who have a higher chance of entering better high schools.	68% (17)	89.3% (25)
3) The senior high school entry rate affects a school's reputation; using streaming may increase pupils' change of entering a better senior high school.	48% (12)	71.4% (20)
4) The senior high school entry rate affects the enrolment of a school. Schools need to use streaming to encourage pupils to enrol.	64% (16)	75% (21)
5) The senior high school entry system still emphasises students' academic attainments, which will influence teachers' willingness to teach in a mixed-ability classroom.	44% (11)	53.6%(15)
6) The senior high school entry system is more flexible now, which will facilitate the practice of mixed-ability grouping.	28% (7)	17.9% (5)
7) The testing questions in the senior high school entry examination now focus on basic ability, which makes teachers more likely to want to teach in mixed-ability classrooms.	28% (7)	14.3% (4)
8) No influence.	4% (1)	0% (0)

6.4. Summary

To summarise, the responding principals in the two surveyed counties had very similar attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy. Their understanding of teachers' and parents' attitudes towards the policy was also similar.

The mixed-ability grouping policy was recognised as being positive in that it increases pupils' confidence about learning, it equalises the distribution of educational resources and it 'normalises' school teaching. However, the surveyed principals worried about the overall academic attainments of pupils and the education of more academically able pupils under the adoption of mixed-ability grouping; and according to their understanding, teachers and parents worried about the same negative influences, too. In other words, the claims that were used to support the policy, such as alleviating the divide between pupils and the unequal distribution of resources within schools, have been recognised. However, arguments, such as using mixed-ability grouping lowers pupils' academic performance and 'sacrifices' the learning of the more academically able pupils, still pervaded schools. These findings are similar to studies in England where teachers perceived that "teaching in ability groups may raise pupils' attainments and using mixed-ability grouping may constrain higher ability pupils from "reaching their full potential" (Ireson & Hallam, 2001, p. 109).

In terms of issues regarding teaching, the surveyed principals were aware that teachers found it more difficult to teach mixed-ability groups than homogeneous classes. They indicated that teachers frequently mentioned that it is difficult to design suitable lesson plans and that the efficiency of teaching decreases. However, class size was not a big issue raised in the results of this questionnaire compared to research findings in other countries (Loveless, 1999).

As for the influence of parents, the principals stated that school educators believed that

most parents are sceptical about the mixed-ability grouping policy and they considered parents' opinions as an important part of the decision-making process. However, it should be noted that although every responding principal has encountered parents who have resisted the policy, they also indicated that only a small number of parents have presented this kind of argument and have tried to request schools to use streaming. How a small number of parents have created the popular perception among educators that most parents are sceptical about the policy is an interesting phenomenon that is worth further exploration.

In addition, it can be seen that under the strict regulations about grouping practice, most schools followed the regulations accordingly and used mixed-ability grouping or setting in certain subjects in certain years. Nonetheless, the principals indicated that setting and streaming were still adopted in extra classes and that using gifted or talented classes to group higher attaining pupils was not uncommon. Within schools, the suggestion of adopting various types of grouping practices was constantly mentioned by teachers or parents. According to the principals, teachers and parents often proposed the use of streaming and setting in the five main subjects.³⁷ There were also concerns about establishing special classes for the more academically able pupils. The principals' responses implied that teachers and parents supported homogeneous groups because they believed that this type of grouping would facilitate teaching and learning. The results are similar to the findings in the UK where teachers tend to have a positive attitude about teaching in differentiated groups (Ireson & Hallam, 2001). The findings also suggest that although many schools followed the mixed-ability grouping legislation, conflicts within schools over suitable grouping practices were visible.

Finally, the findings show that the principals viewed the wider educational contexts,

³⁷ The five main subjects include maths, Chinese, English, science and social studies, which are also the subjects that are tested in the senior high school entry examination.

namely the senior high school entry system and the entry examination, as the most influential barriers that hindered the implementation of the policy. It was also suggested by the principals that by abolishing the senior high school entry examination and establishing 12-year compulsory education, the competition between parents and between schools, which was viewed as leading to the support of streaming, might be alleviated. The principals' responses also show that the recent reform of the senior high school entry system has not made a significant difference to teaching and learning in junior high schools. The changes that were alleged by the MOE, such as simplifying the content of examinations and expanding the provision of senior high schools, have not alleviated the competition among junior high schools and the request for the adoption of streaming to boost pupils' academic performance.

Chapter 7 : A passive resistance—the policy practice at Pinewood Junior High

As suggested by scholars, the implementation of educational policy is shaped by the ‘politics’ within different arenas (Ball, 1981; Cuban, 2008; Malen & Knapp, 1997), and the school, which is the first-line arena that bears the top-down pressure, ideology conflicts, local politics and the practical matters, cannot be appropriately understood without the understanding of its local context.

In the previous chapters, it was found that the changing mainstream educational ideologies and the transformation of the education state that resulted from the change of political regimes have shaped the arguments and discourses about the mixed-ability grouping policy. Additionally, the central and the local educational authorities have developed their own rationales and measures to implement or to react to the policy. In the following two chapters I intend to present the complexity of policy practice at the school level and to unfold the influence of the wider contexts on policy practice in two junior high schools.

Through investigating the attitudes and actions of school educators and also through their understanding of the within-schools conflicts over the necessity, the meaning and the ideologies of the mixed-ability grouping policy, this study found that the educators managed to balance their own conflicted or sometimes contradictory opinions and they have created a consensual discourse that supports the current practice in schools.

This chapter explores the grouping practice and the attitudes of the school educators at Pinewood Junior High towards the mixed-ability grouping policy. How the educators perceive the key contested issues and how these perceptions influence their views about the policy are also explored.

7.1. Basic information about Pinewood Junior High

Pinewood Junior High School (pseudonym) is located in a rural town in a Southern county (Sunrise County) in Taiwan. The main industries in the rural seaside town are agriculture and fishery. According to the principal at Pinewood, around 85% of the pupils' parents are farmers, fishermen and blue-collar factory workers. Professionals, government employees and small industry owners make up the remaining 15%. The principal's description of the general socio-economic status of a pupil's family is 'about average'.

At the time of being studied in late 2007, there were 1064 pupils at the school. Pupils were placed in three grades based on their ages. The 1st and 2nd grades each had 10 classes and the 3rd grade had 11 classes. With 77 teachers and 15 administrative staff, the school is a typical mid-size junior high school in Taiwan. Pinewood used to have 72 classes for three grades to accommodate a much larger pupil intake. It was when another junior high school was established in the neighbourhood in 1997 that the pupil intake at Pinewood gradually decreased.

7.2. The general grouping practice in Sunrise County and the controversies

This section briefly summarises the previous surveys regarding the grouping practices of Sunrise County where Pinewood Junior High is located (including the survey conducted in this research), and it will provide background information so the practices of the mixed-ability grouping at Pinewood Junior High can be better understood.

Sunrise County had 49 junior high schools in 2007. While county is the level that the MOE targets when evaluating the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy, Sunrise County gained a 'fair' mark in the most recent large-scale evaluation conducted by the MOE in 2002. Nonetheless, the officer of Sunrise's local educational authority used to

state publicly that although they supported the mixed-ability policy, they expected to have more freedom to establish talented classes and to use setting.

The large scale surveys conducted by the HEF about the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy in schools in 2003, 2004, and 2008 showed that when pupils were asked about whether schools divided pupils into higher and lower, A and B, or advanced and general classes for a whole day or on a whole class basis, 93.3% of the surveyed schools in Sunrise County were found to stream pupils using various disguises such as establishing talented classes, or creating so-called ‘whole-day and all subjects’ setting in 2003. In 2008, around 66.7% of the surveyed junior high schools were reported by pupils as using streaming, which was less than the 93.3% figure five years earlier.

In addition, although the survey showed a decrease in the use of streaming in junior high schools in Sunrise County, the disputes about the ‘disguised forms’ of streaming in schools have been discussed fiercely in recent years. The establishment of talented and gifted classes was criticised by the supporters of the mixed-ability grouping policy as violating the policy. In Sunrise County, the local educational authority approved the establishment of 81 ‘art talented classes’ in 48 junior high schools in 2005. The MOE investigated the situation quickly and decided that Sunrise local educational authority should revoke its approval of the establishment of art-talented classes due to its violation of both the regulations of art education and the mixed-ability grouping legislation. Sunrise County’s magistrate showed great resistance to this result and publicly condemned the MOE’s decision. The magistrate’s argument was that the establishment of art-talented classes was to improve art education in junior high schools, not to boost pupils’ attainment as was believed by the MOE. However, it was clear that the establishment of these classes was an important strategy that schools adopted to attract higher attaining pupils. One principal’s concern was published in the United Daily News (C-C. Wang, 2007, p. C1):

While we are restricted in establishing talented classes, we see some other schools establish some fancy named 'special extra curriculum clubs' to attract higher attaining pupils. The competition (of utilising special groups to attract higher attaining pupils between schools) is not getting any better and pupils are being attracted by those schools that know how to 'group them'.

Another dispute was about the gifted class. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, there was a sudden increase in gifted classes in many counties so the MOE later decided to revise the relevant regulations to prevent schools from using gifted classes to boost pupils' test scores. In Sunrise County, the resistance from parents and schools was also fierce. After the new regulations were issued a number of parents from four different schools publicly protested to the MOE, arguing that gifted pupils should not only be grouped occasionally as was stated in the new regulations. Some principals also supported parents' argument and stated that it would be inconvenient to provide more resources for gifted pupils if they were not placed in the same class.

Despite the argument, it is found in the survey conducted in this study that around half of the principals interviewed thought that the purpose for schools to establish these special classes was mainly to group higher attaining pupils to boost their attainments.

Nonetheless, we can see from chapter 5 that in spite of the resistance, the local educational authority recognises the legal status of these regulations and manages to implement the mixed-ability grouping policy based on local situations. As mentioned in chapter 5, Sunrise's local educational authority applied sanctions against the violation of the policy in 2007, but after 2008 the administrative officers decided to give schools more freedom to amend their grouping practice instead of using sanctions in the first place. However, as mentioned by the administrative officer at Sunrise's local educational authority, the local educational authority would not actively inspect whether the junior high schools followed the mixed-ability grouping legislation; it was only when complaints were made

about the schools that inspections would be conducted.

In short, Sunrise County has a history of resisting the mixed-ability grouping policy. Those who resist may be the parents, the schools or even the magistrate, and the local educational authority was aware of the local ‘need’ to establish special groups and it tacitly gave schools the freedom to interpret or to create replacement measures. This local context had had an influential impact on the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy in schools.

7.3. The educators

The educators that were interviewed at Pinewood included the principal, the director of teaching affairs and five teachers who teach the five main subjects — Mandarin, English, mathematics, science and social studies. The five subjects are seen as the ‘main subjects’ in Taiwan because they are the ones tested in the senior high school entry examination. Table 24 below shows the background information on my interviewees, including the subjects and grades they taught, the length of their teaching experience and their experience of teaching different kinds of groups. As can be seen below, all the educators interviewed have experience in teaching streamed, set and mixed-ability classes either at other schools or at Pinewood. Although not every teacher interviewed had taught advanced weekend classes at the time of the interview, each of them had taught both the higher and lower attaining sets.

Table 24: The educators interviewed at Pinewood Junior High

The interviewees	Professional subject	Gender	Teaching experience (years)	The grades taught in 2007	If teaches weekend class
<i>Principal</i>	Maths	Female	21	N/A	No
<i>Director of teaching affairs</i>	English	Female	19	N/A(Also handled the counselling office that year)	No
<i>Deputy director of teaching affairs</i>	Science	Male	6	2 nd and 3 rd grade	Yes
<i>English teacher</i>	English	Female	13	2 nd grade	No
<i>Maths teacher</i>	Maths	Male	14	3 rd grade	Yes
<i>Mandarin teacher</i>	Mandarin	Female	28	3 rd grade	Yes
<i>Social studies teacher</i>	History	Female	30	2 nd and 3 rd grade	No

The following paragraphs briefly introduce each interviewee's general attitude about the mixed-ability grouping policy which provides the background information for the following discussions. The general observation is that the opinions of the educators interviewed cover various different perspectives, and they managed to weigh up the concerns generated from the different perspectives to form a personal stance towards the mixed-ability grouping policy.

The principal at Pinewood is a middle-aged lady who is full of energy. At the time of the interview she had just started in the position and she was determined to improve the school, both in terms of education and discipline. For her, Pinewood is a school that has a lot of potential but hadn't been achieved for the last few years. Her attitude towards the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy could be one example of her determination to

improve the school. She was aware of parents' expectations for pupils' academic performance to be improved and for gifted classes to be established, and she pointed out that as a maths teacher she actually supported the adoption of streaming. Therefore, she intended to find a balance between following the legislation, which she viewed as a responsibility of being an administrator, and fulfilling parents' needs. Establishing a gifted class was one objective that she was working on at the time of the interview.

The director of teaching affairs was also new to the position. Before taking over the job she was an English teacher and also the director of the pupil counselling office at Pinewood. Even though her main task as the director of the teaching affairs office was traditionally to improve pupils' attainments, she positioned herself as 'a counselling office teacher' rather than 'a teacher of academic performance' because she cared more about the pupils who were lagging behind. Nonetheless, she also mentioned that the reality was that schools need to care more about academic performance, so improving academic performance was still the school's priorities. When the disputes about the mixed-ability grouping policy were discussed, she argued that teachers' attitudes were crucial to the implementation of any kind of grouping practice. She contended that if teachers' attitudes were right, both the use of streaming and mixed-ability grouping would be acceptable.

The deputy director of teaching affairs is also the science teacher that was interviewed in this study. He was the least experienced teacher out of my interviewees at Pinewood, but his personal interest in the effects of the mixed-ability grouping policy and his position as the deputy director of teaching affairs widened his understanding of the policy and the opinions of the other school educators. For his graduate studies he used the data obtained from Pinewood to find out about the effect that setting has on pupils' academic performance. He found that setting did not significantly increase pupils' overall attainments. Nevertheless, he stated that he still thinks it is more efficient for teachers to teach groups that have been

put into sets. He thought that the mixed-ability grouping policy, which promotes mixed-ability grouping but also allows setting, is an acceptable policy. He was also very aware that parents put pressure on the school and he argued that it is the external environment, such as the senior high school entry examination that contributes to the collective anxiety over pupils' attainments and the violation of the mixed-ability grouping policy.

The English teacher interviewed also agreed that the mixed-ability grouping policy, which promotes mixed-ability grouping but allows setting in some subjects is an acceptable balance. She contended that for teaching's sake, differentiation was definitely better, but teachers need to have the ability to take care of every pupil in mixed-ability groups if they really want to 'educate' children. She thought that the fact that most teachers at junior high schools were higher attaining pupils when they were pupils actually hindered most teachers' perceptions of pupil ability and teaching. Out of the teachers interviewed, she was the most sympathetic towards the mixed-ability grouping policy, but she was also aware of the influence of the senior high school entry examination and stated that the school has no choice but to differentiate between pupils to raise the attainments of the higher attaining ones.

The maths teacher interviewed is a prestigious teacher who was appointed to teach the advanced weekend class. However, he might be the one who resented streaming and even setting the most out of the educators interviewed at Pinewood. He was placed in a lower attaining class at junior high school and he told me that he felt ashamed and looked down on himself at the time. Therefore, although he still thought it would be easier to teach classes that had been put into sets, he insisted that the negative influence of differentiation outweighed the positive influence. Nonetheless, he argued that the competition between schools to gain higher senior high school rates was unavoidable; thus he still participated in

the teaching of the advanced weekend class, which was actually against his ideal.

The Mandarin teacher interviewed was quite experienced. She had taught streamed classes for a long time before teaching mixed-ability groups. Even though she argued that teachers should have the ability to teach different kinds of groups, she strongly believed that Mandarin teachers should also be allowed to use setting and that the mixed-ability grouping policy is only an ideal that is difficult to achieve. Regarding teaching, she had a clear idea about what should be taught to higher and lower ability pupils and she thought that as long as the school was following the legislation, adjustments made to help higher attaining pupils should be welcomed.

The social studies teacher that was interviewed in this study is a history teacher. She was also quite experienced and had been teaching streamed classes for a long time. Although she could appreciate the positive side of the mixed-ability grouping policy and the need to avoid labelling lower attaining pupils, she kept mentioning that homogeneous classes were better for teaching and that the mixed-ability grouping policy was actually failing the higher attaining pupils.

Based on the interviews with the above educators and the questionnaire results about the principal's understanding of the educators' general attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy, the following sections will discuss the practice of the policy at Pinewood from different perspectives. First, I will discuss the attitudes of educators interviewed towards the mixed-ability grouping policy in order to understand their main concerns and the dominant discourses adopted to discuss the disadvantages and advantages of the policy. Second, the current practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy at Pinewood will be presented with reasons for adopting the practice. Then I will discuss the educators' perceptions of pupils' abilities and teaching, which are crucial in shaping educators' attitudes and behaviour in the context of policy practice and I will explain how the wider

educational contexts have an impact on educator's perceptions and how they further influence the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy at Pinewood.

7.4. Educators' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy

In an earlier research study, Ball (1981) identified three different perspectives that the educators utilised in the debate of adopting mixed-ability grouping—the academic perspective, the disciplinary perspective and the idealist perspective. In his study of Beachside Comprehensive, Ball found that while educators were usually aware of the three identified perspectives at the same time, the supporters of mixed-ability grouping usually highlighted the idealist aspect and the disciplinary aspect of utilising mixed-ability grouping arguing the mixed-ability grouping helped to realise the ideal of comprehensive education and to improve school discipline. On the other hand, he found that those who opposed mixed-ability grouping focused more on an academic perspective contending that the learning of the brighter pupils may be infringed in mixed-ability classrooms. A similar finding with regard to educators' attitudes and the perspectives utilised to contend the adoption of mixed-ability grouping is found in this study. In the interviews with educators at Pinewood, we can see that all of the educators interviewed used several different perspectives simultaneously to discuss the mixed-ability grouping policy. Perspectives that are similar to Ball's finding were proposed but the interpretations of these perspectives are in relation to the specific contexts of Taiwanese education.

The first perspective adopted by the educators interviewed is similar to the 'idealist perspective' identified by Ball (1981), which I have called the 'equality perspective' that focuses more on getting fair attention for lower attaining pupils rather than the whole ideal of compulsory education. As suggested earlier, the mixed-ability grouping policy was

originally proposed with the contention that lower-attaining pupils were seriously discriminated against in the stratified learning environment. The educators interviewed at Pinewood all agreed with the above rationales and they were aware of the negative academic and emotional effects that streaming had on pupils. The opinions expressed by the educators interviewed are as follows:

Our education was aberrant when we used streaming. We could see that the teachers thought that the lower attaining pupils were 'bad' pupils; and this perception justified their actions of ignoring these pupils (the principal).

Even though I myself did not label pupils, I think many people do. Further, it wasn't only the pupils in lower attaining classes that were labelled, the teachers who taught lower attaining classes were viewed as being second-rate (the history teacher interviewed).

Pupils can easily feel that there is no point in working hard if they are in a lower attaining class. So, if we stream or set pupils when they start their junior high level education, we are in fact deprived of the opportunity to educate these pupils (the English teacher interviewed).

We can see that the 'equality perspective' is often mentioned as a way of discussing the disadvantages of using streaming. In comparing the findings obtained from Pinewood to Ball's findings at Beachside Comprehensive (Ball, 1981), I would argue that the equality perspective held by educators at Pinewood is subtly different from the 'idealist perspective' identified by Ball. One of my arguments is that even for me interviewees who argued that the streaming adopted in schools deeply discriminates against pupils in lower attaining classes, it seems difficult for them to articulate the 'ideals' of compulsory education and to agree with the contention that mixed-ability grouping would help achieve the ideal of compulsory education. The reason I point this out is that I rarely found my interviewees making connection between the objective and ideal of junior high school education and the mixed-ability grouping policy. It seems that the ideal of compulsory education is 'distant' and 'unpractical' for most of my interviewees while they were busy concerning the

influence of the senior high school entry examination and the pressure from parents.

The disciplinary perspective was also mentioned at Pinewood. However, unlike the discussion demonstrated by Ball that adopting mixed-ability grouping was viewed as a method for dealing with discipline problems in lower bands at Beachside Comprehensive (Ball, 1981), the disciplinary perspective was rarely discussed in the context of policy influence in Taiwan. It is in the context of practice that the disciplinary issue becomes a visible aspect. Educators said this was an advantage of using mixed-ability grouping. The principal stated that one frequently mentioned change that resulted from the mixed-ability grouping policy is the discipline within schools. She stated:

The teachers have told me on several occasions that when the troubled kids are placed in different classes (not in the lowering attaining classes), it becomes harder for them to create discipline problems.

However, issues regarding discipline are not always positive. In relation to the interests of higher attaining pupils, some of the educators interviewed argued that while teachers spend more time on discipline issues in mixed-ability classrooms compared to in higher attaining classes, the 'rights to learn' of the higher attaining pupils are 'sacrificed'. The deputy director of teaching affairs argued:

I can see that ideally in mixed-ability groups the higher attaining pupils may have a positive influence on the lower attaining ones. However, it usually takes time for lower attaining pupils to keep up with the higher attaining pupils. During the period of adjustment, the higher attaining pupils lose something. Or we could say that if they were not placed in mixed-ability groups they may have the chance to learn more.

It was found that at Pinewood concerns about the education of the higher attaining pupils pervaded the discussion of the educators interviewed about the mixed-ability grouping policy. It is at this point the academic perspective is brought in. It was argued that there are certain consequences of teachers needing to be able to accommodate pupils with

different abilities in the same class. These consequences include the higher attaining pupils not being given the level of attention they need and the atmosphere in the class would not be as competitive as in the higher attaining class, so this would have a negative impact on these pupils. Further, all educators interviewed at Pinewood argued that using streaming or setting 'definitely' has a positive impact on teaching, even the teachers who supported the mixed-ability grouping policy agreed with this. The following statements explain the above arguments:

'Bad money drives out the good'. I think using mixed-ability grouping may just result in this negative effect (that higher attaining pupils are dragged down by the lower attaining pupils) (the principal).

Teachers are worried about the fact that if they mainly teach the middle level materials they will be failing the higher ability pupils (the director of teaching affairs).

We shouldn't ignore the higher ability students' right to education just so 'no child is left behind'. I think mixed-ability grouping is an ideal. We do help the pupils whose attainments are average, but we can hardly help the lower attaining ones and we are failing the more academically able pupils (the Mandarin teacher interviewed).

I do not think mixed-ability grouping would help both the higher and lower ability pupils. Rather, it would hold the higher ability pupils back (the History teacher interviewed).

If you consider only the academic perspective, it is definitely that using streaming or setting is more positive to teaching (the English teacher interviewed).

When only considering teaching, streaming and setting make teaching easier for teachers (the maths teacher interviewed).

It is worth noting that whilst the educators interviewed were concerned about higher attaining pupils' learning, there was another kind of 'equality perspective' revealed in their opinions. For example, the history teacher interviewed argued that using mixed-ability grouping would only achieve 'fake equality' rather than 'true equality' because the learning of higher attaining pupils would be negatively affected, in which situation the higher

attaining pupils cannot have an equal opportunity to learn.

Thus, the school educators welcomed the use of setting and it was viewed as being necessary to complement the mixed-ability grouping policy. Furthermore, the teachers who teach subjects such as Mandarin and Social Studies, which are not allowed to use setting, argued that they should be permitted to do so.

It is worth noting that while the terms ‘positive to teaching’ and ‘easier to teach’ were commonly used by the educators interviewed and were also documented by previous research in Taiwan (S-F. Liu, 2004), insufficient research has been conducted on Taiwanese junior high school educators’ perceptions of teaching. This study found that when discussing in-depth about teaching in different kinds of groups, an embedded and shared ‘imagination towards teaching’, which is highly correlated with the wider educational context in Taiwan and teachers’ attitudes toward the mixed-ability grouping policy was detected. This part of the discussion will be presented in later sections.

There was also a specific dimension of academic perspective held by the educators interviewed at Pinewood, which uses the ‘senior high school entry rate’ as a criterion to argue for the disadvantage of the mixed-ability grouping policy. As has been shown before, it was argued constantly by the opponents of the mixed-ability grouping policy that using mixed-ability grouping would decrease schools’ ‘senior high school entry rate’. Many educators and parents believe that using mixed-ability grouping negatively affects the more academically able pupils’ chances of getting a place at the highest-ranking senior high schools. Nearly all of the educators interviewed at Pinewood discussed this issue first when they were asked about their opinion about the mixed-ability grouping policy. The educators interviewed could clearly remember the number of pupils that had got places at satisfactory high schools and they attributed this figure to the grouping practice they adopted. Though this consideration was argued as the ‘practical concern’ that resulted

from the senior high school entry competition, it was found that the belief of using mixed-ability grouping would decrease the senior high school entry rate pervaded the discourse of the educators interviewed, even among the ones that were in sympathy with the ideals of the policy. Further, as school educators perceived that parents had the same opinion about the policy, the school felt obliged to develop various strategies, most of which involved the practice of special grouping to grouping higher attaining pupils in order to satisfy parents' demands.

In short, the opinions of the educators interviewed about the mixed-ability grouping policy can be seen as highly influenced by the senior high school entry competition. No matter which perspectives were discussed, the concerns about the senior high school entry rate, and also the higher attaining pupils' chance of entering the highest-ranking senior high schools overshadowed other perspectives and had an impact on the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy. The next section will discuss the current practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy at Pinewood in more detail.

7.5. The current grouping practice and decision-making concerns

Following the mixed-ability grouping legislation, Pinewood has adopted mixed-ability grouping in the 1st and 2nd grades. In the 3rd grade, maths, English and science classes are organised by sets. Pupils are divided into 'A' and 'B' sets for the three subjects. There were two or three 'A' classes (higher attaining classes) for each subject and the remaining pupils were placed in the six to eight 'B' classes (lower attaining classes).

However, in addition to the grouping practice adopted in normal school hours, Pinewood also had a special grouping arrangement for 'outside' normal school hours. On Saturdays and Sundays during the semester, Pinewood selected around 70 3rd grade higher attaining pupils to form two advanced weekend classes. These pupils were asked to go to

school every Saturday and Sunday, for four hours each day to have extra lessons in the five subjects that are tested in the senior high school entry examination. It was indicated by all of the educators interviewed that the purpose of these extra lessons is to increase pupils' chances of getting a place at the highest-ranking senior high schools. According to the principal, it is because that the mixed-ability grouping legislation prohibits the grouping of higher attaining pupils on a whole-day basis, which is demanded by parents and sometimes by teachers, that means that they could only create the higher attaining classes that were accepted by demanding parents outside normal school hours. She explained:

There are many parents and some teachers asking whether we can use streaming in normal school hours. Although I understand their concerns, I myself think that as a leader I must follow the legislation. Thus I usually tell them that we should follow the rules, but if there are other things we can do, I will definitely support it. That's why now we take a little step forward to establish the advanced weekend classes for the higher attaining pupils. The previous principal hadn't dared to do this because he thought it might have violated the mixed-ability grouping policy, but many schools had already established these weekend classes.

According to the educators interviewed, the desire to get a place at a good senior high school is the most important reason for parents to demand, and for the schools to establish the advanced weekend classes. The deputy director of teaching affairs indicated:

We have no choice but to establish the classes because of the senior high school entry competition and parents' requests. It has reached the stage that if we do not provide weekend classes, parents would complain and criticise us.

A description provided by the director of teaching affairs at Pinewood vividly depicts how parents and schools value academic performance in schools. She said:

At the beginning of every school year, we demonstrate the increase in the senior high school entry rates to parents using a pie chart or bar graph in the School-Parents Meeting. Although we have made steady progress with the number of pupils entering good public schools, parents care about the number of children we send to the

highest-ranking senior high schools the most. I often find this interesting because not every child has the ability to enter the highest-ranking high schools, but every parent asks about the 'highest-ranking high school entry rate' and they are also concerned about the strategies the school has adopted to increase this figure.

The maths teacher interviewed elaborated on the reason why the school was willing to create these extra classes:

I think it is because many people mainly use the senior high school entry rate to evaluate junior high schools. Very few people want to know if pupils are happy at junior high schools. Due to these circumstances, the principal and the teachers at the school have made an effort to improve the school's senior high school entry rate in order to boost the school's reputation.

The parents' demands for a higher senior high school entry rate were said to result in unwanted consequences; among them the most frequently mentioned are a decrease in pupil intake and the competition, in a negative sense, between schools.

In Taiwan, although pupils are normally assigned to public junior high schools based on their catchment area, it is not uncommon for parents to change their child's registration of address so they can get a place at the desired school (D-R. Chang, 1998; P-J. Chiang, 2004, S-M. Chou, 2001; D-Y. Huang, 2006; D-Y. Huang, 2008). Due to these circumstances, junior high schools are facing an uncertain pupil intake, and also the possibility of redundancy among teachers due to the decreased pupil intake. In the last few years at Pinewood there has been a gradual loss of pupil intake to nearby schools and a few teachers have been transferred to other schools against their wishes. Both the principal and the teachers have treated this issue seriously. The principal at Pinewood explained:

If we keep losing pupils we will have to cut class numbers and teachers will be transferred to other schools. [.....] Teachers are very worried that they may be transferred to other school so they are very concerned about the school's senior high school entry rate.

Several strategies were thus developed at Pinewood to retain and to recruit pupils. As demonstrated above, one important strategy was the establishment of advanced weekend classes, which is also a strategy that is implicitly agreed to by the local educational authority, as indicated in chapter 5. Although there are varying opinions regarding the establishment of these classes at Pinewood, for example, some teachers refused to teach weekend classes and others questioned whether it was necessary to provide extra help for the higher attaining pupils, there was a strong sense of 'having no choice' at Pinewood. All of the educators interviewed argued that the creation of advanced weekend classes was necessary because of the pressure to send pupils to the highest-ranking senior high schools.

In addition, it was indicated by the educators interviewed that establishing gifted classes is also a strategy that has been adopted by many other schools to recruit higher attaining pupils. At the time of this research in late 2007, Pinewood was planning to establish an academically gifted class in the following semester. It was confirmed that in September 2008, Pinewood had established one. As stated in the previous chapter, establishing gifted classes in junior high schools has been harshly criticised as backdoor way of grouping higher attaining pupils rather than providing the pupils with statutory gifted education resources. The principal stated:

It would not be unfair to say that the gifted classes in junior high schools are the higher attaining classes. As far as I know most of the schools do not have qualified teachers and most of the gifted classes only focus on boosting pupils' academic performance.

Even though the legislation has been revised in order to prevent schools from utilising gifted classes to boost pupils' attainment, it is still commonly recognised among educators that having a gifted class in schools attracts the higher attaining pupils and would prevent the schools from experiencing a dwindling pupil intake.

To conclude, we can see that the mixed-ability grouping 'legislation' did influence the

practice of the policy at Pinewood and the attitudes of educators. The perception that educators should follow the statutory regulations contributes to the adoption of mixed-ability grouping in normal school hours. However, the senior high school entry rate competition and the concerns over the effects of teaching also influenced educators' attitudes which contributed to the consensus that the school had to establish advanced weekend classes and gifted classes to group higher attaining pupils. Although parents' demands usually go directly to the principal and the director of teaching affairs, teachers were aware of the pressure due to the possibility of them being transferred to another school. Further, the concern about the 'higher attaining pupils', not only regarding their opportunity to gain a place at the highest-ranking senior high schools, but also their 'right to learn' justified the grouping of higher attaining pupils.

It is worth noting that tight internal cooperation is required in order to establish these classes. The principal and the director of teaching affairs need to be responsible for the establishment of these special classes in case any complaints are lodged. The teachers need to be willing to teach extra classes at the weekend. Also, the parents usually take the responsibility of collecting extra tuition from pupils and distributing stipends to teachers for the extra weekend class due to the regulation that prohibits schools to handle any expenses outside of normal school hours. Pinewood thus cooperates with parents and the parents' association in a way that the school provides space and teachers for the weekend classes and the parents handle the financial affairs. According to the educators interviewed at Pinewood, nearly all junior high schools run extra classes in this manner. This phenomenon clearly shows how local actors have managed to make a compromise between the top-down mandate and the local needs, within which complicated concerns are taken into account and various policy actors work together to achieve their desired ends.

7.6. Educators' perceptions of the senior high school entry system and policy practice

As suggested earlier, the senior high school entry system has been a long-term reform target in Taiwan because of its negative influence on junior high level education. The 2001 reform of the senior high school entry system included changes such as introducing new content, which has a greater emphasis on pupils' 'ability' rather than memorisation for the examination, adopting new scoring scales, and utilising new methods to allocate pupils into senior high schools. The reform aimed to mitigate the pressure of pupils to compete in the entry system and to amend the 'abnormal education' which includes the use of streaming in junior high schools before 2001. However, as can be seen above, the senior high school entry examination still plays an important role in the school's decision about grouping practices. As the educators have inferred, although the reform has brought some good, such as the newly introduced examination contents, the key factor that contributes to the pressure that schools are under, namely to evaluate and allocate pupils into different streams of senior high school education mainly by test scores, has not been removed. For example, the principal at Pinewood recognised the change of examination contents made by the reform and indicated that the reform should have changed the teaching methods and the objectives of teaching in junior high schools. However, she also stated:

Although the exam contents have gradually changed, it is difficult for educators and parents to adjust. I have asked the teachers to develop different ways of evaluating their pupils, but I am only aware of minimal changes.

Actually, the teachers interviewed were also aware of the changes to the contents of the examinations and they supported them. However, as the principal highlighted, the teachers did not think that their teaching had been influenced by the revised content. As stated by the deputy director of teaching affairs, the teachers felt they still have so much material to teach

and there is never enough time. For them, the amended senior high school entry system does not seem to be relevant to teaching.

Moreover, it was argued by the educators interviewed that the reform did not change the demands of parents because parents still put pressure on the school to gain high senior high school entry rates. The principal explained their understanding of parents' belief:

Years ago when most Taiwanese people were poor, having good grades so you could get a position within the government was the best way to earn a decent living. Thus, there is this urge for parents to demand that schools make an effort to improve their children's academic performance and a tendency to evaluate junior high schools by their senior high school entry rate.

The deputy director of teaching affairs also indicated:

As long as there is a ranking system for senior high schools, parents will want the best schools and the higher scores for their children.

As a result, educators felt that the senior high school entry rate becomes the main criterion used to evaluate schools, and the main topic discussed by the educators interviewed with regard to the mixed-ability grouping policy was the influence of the senior high school entry system. The educators interviewed indicated that in order to achieve a satisfactory senior high school entry rate or to persuade parents that schools are making an effort to improve, the establishment of extra or special classes and the promotion of the improvements that they have made become another competition between all junior high schools. According to the principal at Pinewood, whether a school uses streaming, setting or has weekend classes determines how they are evaluated.

In addition, it is worth noting that while scholars argue that junior high schools are investing themselves in a 'senior high school entry business' which contributes to the 'abnormal' education, including the adoption of streaming, teaching to test and using corporal punishment in junior high level education (C-W. Wang & W-Y. Lin, 1994), the

school educators interviewed at Pinewood quickly attributed these situations, in this case, the adoption of streaming or special grouping, to the senior high school entry system and the pressure imposed by parents. During the interviews there were rare discussions regarding how school educators use a professional perspective to react to the influence of the senior high school entry system and also the pressure put by parents. In this study, most of the educators interviewed at Pinewood and also at another school³⁸ argued that the immediate crisis of the decrease in pupil intake and personnel cuts hindered the professional reaction to the mixed-ability grouping policy, such as developing different teaching methods.

However, it can be seen that in the long process of the mixed-ability grouping policy the same contention of ‘parents put pressure on’ was repeatedly argued even when the crisis of pupil intake loss did not exist. In other words, while the educators kept adopting the same discourse to discuss the influence of the senior high entry system on the school’s choice of grouping practice, other influences that may have also resulted from the senior high school entry system such as the influences on educators’ perceptions of teaching and learning, which are the two issues at the core of the mixed-ability grouping policy may have been underestimated by educators. These possible influences will be discussed in the next section.

7.7. Educators’ perceptions of pupils’ ability, teaching, and the practice of the policy

Numerous research studies have attempted to understand teachers’ beliefs about pupils’ ability and their influence on teaching (Hamilton, 2006; Prawat, 1992; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1984). In early studies about the effects of grouping practice, it was argued that teachers would have different expectations of children due to the perceived difference

³⁸ The study on North Creek Junior High will be presented in the next chapter.

between pupils' ability framed by the grouping practice (Hallinan, 1994; Oakes, 1985). However, while research regarding the mixed-ability innovation discussed the various issues that affect educators' attitudes towards mixed-ability grouping (Ball, 1981; S-F. Lou, 2004; Reid et al., 1981), the influence of educators' perceptions of pupils' ability on their attitudes towards mixed-ability grouping has been analysed much less. Further, even though the relationship between educators' teaching style and their attitudes towards mixed-ability grouping was explored (Ball, 1981; Reid et al., 1981), how teaching styles may be influenced by wider educational contexts is an area that needs to be looked at in more detail.

The questions asked here are thus as follows: how do educators perceive pupils' ability and teaching in mixed-ability groups when they discuss the advantages and disadvantages of different grouping practices? Do these perceptions influence educators' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy? Are these perceptions of educators influenced by the wider educational contexts, for example the senior high entry system and the development of the education system in Taiwan?

7.7.1. The perceptions of pupils' ability and policy practice

Confucius' saying—'teaching pupils in accordance with their abilities' was often mentioned by educators to support streaming or setting. The difference is that in Classical literature, Confucius provided abundant examples to describe the various dimensions of 'ability', but in the discussion of the mixed-ability grouping, I found that most educators treated the term as self-evident. It was after being asked specifically, that educators started to provide definitions or examples to elaborate their perceptions of pupils' ability. Three popular ways of describing pupils' ability emerged after I synthesised the explicit explanations provided by the educators and the implicit perceptions embedded in the educators' arguments. These three popular discourses are found to be closely related to

pupils' attainments and teachers' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy.

The most popular way adopted to describe pupils' ability is to simply differentiate between high and low ability. This description was usually suggested when discussing the advantages and the disadvantages of using streaming and teaching in mixed-ability groups.

The educators' statements are as follows:

I disagree that streaming is a negative way of grouping pupils because the intention of streaming is to teach pupils in accordance with their abilities. I think it is reasonable for teachers to provide advanced materials to pupils with a higher ability and general materials to pupils with a lower ability (science teacher interviewed).

I think there is only a small possibility of improving the academic attainments of pupils in lower sets to the level of pupils in higher sets because of the natural difference in pupils' abilities (English teacher interviewed).

We ask the pupils who have a lower ability to memorise the basic pronunciation, the written characters and the explanation of words. They are generally less able to make judgements and to deliberate than the higher ability pupils (Mandarin teacher interviewed).

In these statements, higher ability means having the ability to digest advanced materials and being capable of making judgements and criticising, and lower ability means only having the ability to memorise basic facts and to digest intermediate materials. Further, ability is viewed as being fixed in these statements that the educators interviewed described 'ability' as a trait that would not be altered by external forces (Dweck, 1999; Prawat, 1992). This finding may further infer that teachers at Pinewood had a static view towards their own teaching due to the belief that pupils' ability is 'non interactive' (Monk & Simpson, 1989, as cited in Prawat, 1992).

The second most popular way of describing pupils' ability is to differentiate between pupils that have academic aptitudes and vocational aptitudes. This differentiation usually arose when the educators interviewed were discussing parents' views about their children.

For example, when the principal explained how parents put pressure on the school, she said:

Some parents just ignored the fact that their children have less potential in academic learning but more talent in other areas such as painting and crafts...etc.

For the principal, the lack of understanding about children's academic or vocational aptitudes was one of the significant reasons that parents 'irrationally' put pressure on the school to raise pupils' attainments.

The divide between academic and vocational aptitudes was also raised when the teachers talked about the advantages of streaming. The history teacher interviewed repeated the idea several times during the interview:

I think pupils with vocational aptitudes would be taken better care of in a streamed system. In the old days all pupils knew that if they could not study well in schools they would need to learn a skill in order to make a living.

A clear distinction between academic and vocational aptitudes was also made when the director of teaching affairs tried to picture an ideal way of using streaming. She stated:

If we stream pupils, we need to make sure that teachers and the community will not look down on pupils with vocational aptitudes and the teachers who teach vocational subjects. Other than taking care of pupils' academic attainments we also need to provide space for pupils whose interests and abilities are in vocational areas.

In an analytical sense, this dichotomy reflects at least two subtle beliefs. The first is that academic aptitudes and vocational aptitudes are two mutually exclusive abilities that cannot be simultaneously possessed by individuals. The notions that parents rarely look closely at their children's potential and that parents often ignore their children's vocational ability support the above belief. The second subtle belief held by the educators interviewed is that having lower attainments means having a vocational aptitude. The idea that 'those who cannot "study well" should learn a skill' is embedded in many educators' arguments. Further, similar to the distinction between the higher and the lower ability, the academic and

vocational aptitudes are also considered to be fixed rather than something that could be altered by external forces.

It is worth noting that the construction of pupils' ability as academic or vocational resembles the academic and vocational division in senior high level education. As discussed in chapter 4, the provision of senior high level education was not only streamed but also highly stratified until the reform starting from 2001. For a lengthy period of time pupils were allocated into academic or vocational schools solely based on their test scores in the senior high school entry examination and the vocational schools were always viewed as second-rate educational institutions. The differentiation between academic and vocational has been built into people's perceptions, and most of the educators interviewed at Pinewood believed that pupils could be divided by academic or vocational aptitudes based on their academic attainments.

The third way that the educators interviewed used to describe pupils' ability was referring to pupils' background knowledge. The reason that I have included this viewpoint is because the educators who were concerned about this issue argued that possessing more background knowledge is a feature of having a higher ability. Two senior teachers, the Mandarin teacher interviewed and the history teacher interviewed spent a lot of time discussing this matter during the interview.

The higher ability pupils usually have better background knowledge for learning Mandarin and Chinese literature. The lower ability pupils do not respond to the materials I use because of their lack of background knowledge (Mandarin teacher interviewed).

The pupils who have better background knowledge are usually more able to react to my teaching (history teacher interviewed).

The Mandarin teacher gave an example that higher ability pupils may know of more famous writers than lower ability pupils; the history teacher also indicated that higher ability

pupils know more historical stories. As can be seen, the two educators interviewed assumed that the possession of more background knowledge requires higher ability, and the amount of background knowledge demonstrated by pupils is a valid indicator for distinguishing pupils' ability. Nonetheless, this perception by educators may be a manifestation of how schools transmit and appreciate the dominate culture, such as the 'linguistic and cultural competence', which is usually cultivated in the upper-class family without being aware of its influence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1997). The fact that the Mandarin teacher interviewed and the history teacher interviewed were the ones who emphasised the importance of utilising background knowledge to learn about pupils' ability in a way supports the above argument. Further, in this case the educators not only appreciated the culture, but interpreted it as a signifier of the merits of individuals to justify the impartialness of their understanding of pupils' ability. This stands as a manifestation of how social reproduction functions under the cover of meritocracy.

One thing that it is important to highlight is that although the educators used different criteria to describe pupils' ability, the foundation they used to apply these criteria was always pupils' academic performance. During the interviews, the educators constantly attributed higher ability, academic aptitude, higher levels of motivation and more background knowledge to pupils in higher sets. However, if we consider the fact that schools mainly select pupils for higher sets based on their academic attainments, namely test scores, it is worth considering whether the most important indication of 'ability' in junior high school is pupils' academic performance. Other indicators seem to be the derivatives of test scores that cannot be detected and determined without them.

To summarise, educators at Pinewood used higher and lower, academic and vocational, and the amount of background knowledge possessed by pupils to describe pupils' ability. Their arguments show that they firmly believed that pupils' ability is fixed, and when taking

this perception into consideration it seems that using streaming or setting is more reasonable for ‘teaching in accordance with pupils’ ability’. As suggested above, several educators argued that using streaming is valid because pupils have differing abilities. Furthermore, there is a belief that as long as teachers’ attitudes and teaching methods can be changed, streaming would be better for accommodating pupils who have different abilities and different aptitudes.

7.7.2. The perceptions of teaching in mixed-ability groups and policy practice

Another constantly mentioned perspective in the discussion about mixed-ability grouping policy that is rarely explored in-depth in Taiwan is the ‘teaching’ in classrooms. As previously suggested, most of the educators interviewed at Pinewood indicated that it is easier to teach streamed or set classes. They gave various reasons which are shown as follows. The first is that it is easier to choose teaching materials for homogeneous classes because teachers do not have to worry if the materials bore the higher attaining pupils or are too difficult for the lower attaining ones. The second is that it is easier to evaluate pupils’ performance. Since pupils are at a similar academic level, teachers do not have to set different goals for pupils with different abilities. Also, a higher academic standard can be set for higher attaining pupils. Thirdly, it allows teachers to set different teaching objectives. For example, arousing pupils’ interest in learning may be the primary goal for teaching lower attaining classes, while preparing advanced materials and more challenging questions would be the main tasks when teaching higher attaining classes.

In order to connect teaching practice to educators’ attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy, further questions were asked about interviewees’ ‘teaching practice’ in mixed-ability groups and in set classes. One discovery that was made was that when asked

about 'teaching' in mixed-ability groups, the educators interviewed quickly referred to the teaching materials they used and the pace of instruction. Methods of instruction and the classroom activities were generally omitted from the conversation. It was when the educators were further probed about their usual classroom activities, they started to describe the methods of instruction that they had adopted. I later found that this might have been because dictation was the most common instruction method, so the educators might not have felt it was necessary to discuss it.

Regarding the teaching materials used in teaching mixed-ability groups, most teachers said they could only use 'middle level materials'. The definition of 'middle level materials' was not clear at first. However, later it slowly emerged that the term 'middle level materials' referred to the amount of materials rather than their degree of difficulty. The history teacher interviewed explained:

When teaching the higher attaining classes a number of years ago we could choose advanced materials for pupils and they would improve quickly; but now we need to cut the amount of materials in order to teach the mixed-ability groups.

The Mandarin teacher interviewed also argued:

Because the gap between pupils' abilities is so wide, I can only choose materials that are suitable for middle level pupils. I would encourage the more able students to practice more test questions and to order more materials so they can study on their own.

The pace of instruction was also mentioned by all of the interviewees. The maths teacher I interviewed, who was the only one to indicate that teaching mixed-ability groups is not as difficult as people imagined it to be, stated that he generally taught mixed-ability groups at a slower pace and he provided an explanation of details that were usually omitted when teaching higher attaining classes. The English teacher interviewed also gave an example about the changes to her teaching pace. For the higher sets, she usually read the

texts to pupils directly because they could keep up with her; but for pupils in lower sets or in mixed-ability groups, she needed to hang posters up at the front of the classroom to point out the lines she was reading, which slowed the pace of her teaching down.

In fact, both the materials used and the pace of instruction were considered to be important due to their relevance of preparing pupils for the senior high school entry examination. For example, it was argued by all of the educators interviewed that the teaching materials used in mixed-ability groups were insufficient for higher attaining pupils to get satisfactory scores; thus they thought it was necessary to provide higher attaining pupils with advanced materials in either set classes or the advanced weekend classes. The deputy director of teaching affairs indicated:

We have to care about pupils' performance in the senior high school entry examination. You cannot just ignore it. You can leave out the most difficult materials but we usually need to rush our teaching in order to prepare pupils for the examination.

In other words, the examination and the curriculum which defines the scope of examination together impose limits on educators' teaching.

Another limitation set by the examination may be the unitary teaching method adopted. As mentioned above, initially none of the educators interviewed described their teaching methods when they were asked about their 'teaching' in mixed-ability groups. After further probing it was found that most teachers did not think it was possible to change teaching methods because of the entry examination pressure. The teachers interviewed stated that they mainly lectured when teaching mixed-ability groups because there was never enough time to cover all the material in the textbooks. The same teaching method was also applied in the advanced weekend class, and the main activities adopted in almost every class were lecturing, testing, reviewing and correction. The science teacher gave his views on using dictation and whole-class teaching in higher attaining classes:

It is quite efficient to use dictation in higher attaining classes because higher attaining pupils tend to think that they have to learn everything taught by teachers. In order to earn high scores in the senior high school entry examination, they will devour all the materials we give them without considering whether the materials are of interest or use.

To sum up, in considering the teaching in mixed-ability groups, the amount of materials and the pace of teaching were found to be educators' main concerns. Lecturing is the main teaching style adopted by the teachers interviewed in teaching both homogeneous and heterogeneous classes, and educators argued that the innovation of teaching was confined by the concern about preparing pupils for the tests.

7.8. Summary

In this chapter I have attempted to demonstrate the response to the mixed-ability grouping policy at Pinewood Junior High. Through exploring the educators' attitudes towards the policy, the school's choice of grouping practice and the educators' perceptions of teaching, learning, and the senior high school entry system, I have found that there are at least three perspectives that should be looked at together in order to understand the policy practice at Pinewood. These are the individuals' attitudes and actions, the practical 'needs' of the school, and the influence, both explicitly and implicitly, of the wider educational contexts. All of these perspectives influence each other, and also affect the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy.

Although the educators interviewed were all aware of the issues regarding the various perspectives of the mixed-ability grouping policy—the equality perspective, the disciplinary perspective and the academic perspective, they utilised the academic perspective to support the practice of the school. Under the pressure of the between-school competition and the need to attain a high senior high school entry rate, the academic perspective has dominated discussions about the mixed-ability grouping at Pinewood and it has contributed to the

establishment of advanced weekend and gifted classes. Even the educators who seemed to be in favour of other perspectives felt that the concern about pupils' academic performance was indispensable. Due to its recent decrease in pupil intake, Pinewood has acknowledged that they need to work harder to 'win' pupils back in the between-school competitions. In this case, the practical needs of the school form and reinforce the school-wide consensus of establishing extra special classes, which is a strategy commonly used by other competing schools.

Finally, the educators interviewed argued that the senior high school entry examination puts enormous pressure on parents and also the school to ensure the pupils' performance in examinations is satisfactory, which provokes the competition of establishing special classes or using secret streaming between schools. This is the explicit influence of the wider educational context on the grouping practice of the school. However, I have attempted to demonstrate that the educators' perceptions about pupils' ability and teaching in mixed-ability groups are also confined by the senior high school entry examination. As demonstrated above, no matter how the educators' described pupils' ability, it was pupils' academic attainments that were the foundation for them to attribute various traits to pupils. Also, the emphasis put by the educators interviewed on the amount of teaching materials and teaching pace when they talked about their teaching is also highly correlated with the preparation of the big examination. These implicit influences of the wider educational contexts on junior high school teaching are crucial but were rarely acknowledged in the school.

Chapter 8 : A conditioned implementation—the policy practice at North Creek Junior High

This chapter investigates the grouping practice and the educators' attitudes at North Creek Junior High School towards the mixed-ability grouping policy. This is the second case study that was conducted as part of this research for the purpose of discovering the policy practice in individual schools within the wider educational contexts.

As will be shown in later sections, the grouping practice at North Creek Junior High is a little bit different from the school in the first case study. Whilst North Creek has also established advanced weekend classes and a controversial sport talented class, in normal school hours North Creek only adopts mixed-ability grouping without using setting in any subjects. Although it is not easy to verify the extent to which the adoption of mixed-ability grouping has influenced the educators' attitudes, or the extent to which the educators' attitudes, which may have been shaped by the training and teaching experiences and the personal traits of the educators at North Creek, has contributed to the grouping practice adopted, it has been found that the educators at North Creek have a more positive opinion on the adoption of mixed-ability grouping. They also argued that the mixed-ability grouping policy helps to equalise resource distribution within schools, to decrease the negative labelling on pupils and teachers, and to enhance pupils' discipline.

Nonetheless, just like the school in the first case study, North Creek Junior High is also searching for a balance between the various pressures with regard to the mixed-ability grouping policy. The mandated policy, the pressure imposed by parents to raise the senior high school entry rate, and the conflicts within the school all play a crucial part in the grouping practice related decision-making process. It is worth noting that the educators at North Creek have developed a consensual discourse that agreeing that keeping high pupils'

attainments is the most important condition for successfully implementing the mixed-ability grouping policy. For educators at North Creek, this argument on the one hand allows them to deal with the ‘practical’ concerns by putting a large amount of effort into boosting pupils’ attainments, and on the other hand it secures the adoption of the mixed-ability grouping policy.

In the rest of the chapter, some basic information about the studied school, its local context, which refers to the policy practice of other schools within the county, the policy practice at North Creek, the process of making decisions about the policy practice and educators’ attitudes and opinions regarding the policy will be presented.

8.1. Basic information about North Creek Junior High

North Creek Junior High School (pseudonym) is located in North Creek, Middle Line County, which is in the west side of Taiwan. Middle Line County is one of the three earliest developed counties in the island and it is known as the ‘the granary of Taiwan’ due to its fertile soil. It was also once the political and economic centre in Taiwan due to its excellent geographic location. Even though the political and economic functions have declined, the advanced education that was developed with the thriving of political and economic developments still has an impact on the education within the county today. Using North Creek as an example, this town has long been honoured as a distinctive place that cultivates ‘traditional Chinese scholars’, where the community and parents pay great attention to education.

Nowadays, the main industries in North Creek are manufacturing, small businesses and public and individual services. According to the principal at North Creek Junior High, the pupils’ families’ general socio-economic status is ‘about average’.

As a medium sized junior high school, North Creek Junior High at the time of research

had 1233 pupils, 84 full-time teachers and 10 administrative staff. The pupils were placed in a total of 37 classes for three grades. According to the director of teaching affairs, the pupil intake at North Creek once decreased around ten years ago due to a notorious pupil behaviour problem and low academic performance. It was not until the current principal took the position five years ago that the school started to recruit pupils 'back' to North Creek.

8.2. The general grouping practice in Middle Line county and the controversies

The controversy over the mixed-ability grouping policy in Middle Line County was unveiled widely by the media in Taiwan. Through a dramatic protest conducted by a local junior high school teacher and a documentary that aimed to discuss the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Middle Line County, the hidden streaming and the unequal distribution of resources to pupils in junior high schools in Middle Line County was revealed to the Taiwanese people.

In the most recent large scale report of 'the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy' released by the MOE in 2002, the practice of the policy in Middle Line County was evaluated as 'unsatisfactory', which was the lowest level. In the follow-up meeting, the officers at Middle Line County's local educational authority acknowledged that parents had made strong demands for streaming to be used and the junior high schools would have to conform to the parents' needs to avoid the decrease of pupil intake and also the decrease of teaching positions. The latter point reveals the sense of competition between junior high schools, which will be discussed in later sections.

From 2002 till 2009, several other surveys were conducted to learn about the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Middle Line County. In 2003, the HEF survey which

surveyed pupils asking about their experience of schools' grouping practice reported that 92% of the surveyed schools in Middle Line County were still using streaming (HEF, 2003). Also in the same year, the controversies surrounding the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Middle Line County attracted national attention. As demonstrated in chapter 4, the protest of teacher Li-Hui Wu attracted the public's attention with her dramatic action of kneeling down in front of the school she worked at to beg the school not to differentiate between children based on attainments (H-C. Chien, 2003, p. B2; Y-P. Chuang, 2006). The main point she was making was that the school administrators intentionally ignored the mixed-ability grouping policy and threatened teachers to make them accept streaming.

Miss Wu's protest and the continuing controversies over the mixed-ability grouping policy contributed to the production of a documentary in 2004. The Public Television in Taiwan created a documentary called 'Magic Mirror' which revealed the hidden adoption of streaming in Middle Line County's junior high schools. The pupils that were interviewed in this documentary stated that they all knew that there were 'better classes' in schools that received more attention from teachers. One of the principals who were interviewed indicated that the majority of junior high schools in the county streamed students. We also found from the documentary that there was a strong conflict with regard to the adoption of mixed-ability grouping among different policy actors. On the one hand, some teachers, parents, and also the local teachers' association strongly supported the mixed-ability grouping policy and argued that schools shouldn't violate educational regulations; but on the other hand, some local county counsellors, parents, and also schools voiced their doubts about the mixed-ability grouping policy and argued that the needs of higher attaining pupils and the competition presented by junior high schools should not be ignored.

Despite the controversy surrounding Middle Line County, in the policy making arena,

the supporters of the mixed-ability grouping policy triumphed with the passage of the mixed-ability grouping legalisation by using the controversy in Middle Line County as an important example. In 2004, the mixed-ability grouping legislation was passed by the Legislative Yuan as an article in the 'Compulsory Education Act' stating that mixed-ability grouping should be adopted by primary and junior high schools.

Just like other counties in Taiwan, Middle Line County responded that it would follow the policy due to its legal status, but it also argued that the mixed-ability grouping legislation would not be able to solve the practical problems. For example, the director of Middle Line County's local educational authority, Mr. Hsi-Hsun Wu, indicated in a newspaper interview that some junior high school principals in the county were preparing to retire due to the enormous yet contrasting pressure imposed by parents and the mixed-ability grouping legislation (H-C. Chien, 2004, p. B2). Nonetheless, he also indicated that under pressure from the legislation, Middle Line County had to conform to the law and decided to adopt a computer programme to organise pupils into mixed-ability groups randomly. This computerised random pupil distribution was seen as an important measure to prevent individual schools from streaming pupils.

However, we can see that the concern over the competition between schools and the idea that higher attaining pupils should be taken better care of continually influenced the grouping practice in junior high schools in Middle Line County. In 2005, Middle Line County's local teachers' association and the HEF published a report condemning the junior high schools in Middle Line for turning the talented class into the traditional higher attaining class. Whilst the talented classes were supposed to provide resources to help pupils to develop their special talents, this report revealed that the pupils in these classes neither mastered any specific talents, nor spent any time practising them (S-H. Lu, 2005; H-L. Lo, J-Y. Hsu, T-M. Tsai, Y-S. Chen, & C-H. Chen, 2005, p. C8). In 2007, Miss Wu, the

‘kneeling down’ teacher and several parents protested again. This time they argued that junior high schools in Middle Line also used ‘gifted classes’ as a disguise for the ‘higher attaining classes’. They stated that the gifted classes that were established in the school did not provide pupils with an adequate education; rather it mainly aimed to push pupils to obtain high scores in the senior high school entrance exam. The evidence of this was that the music class, the civil education class, and the integration activity classes in these gifted classes were often replaced by the maths class, English class and different kinds of academic tests (S-C. Wu, 2007, p. C2).

Similar to the situation in Sunrise County in 2006 and 2007, there was an increase in the number of gifted classes created by junior high schools in Middle Line. The governor of Middle Line County also publically supported the establishment of gifted classes and argued that the creation of more gifted classes was the only way pupils at schools in Middle Line County would be able to compete with pupils in other counties (H-C. Chien, 2007, p. C1). Middle Line’s local educational authority also distributed a survey to parents to collect their attitudes towards the establishment of gifted classes in junior high schools. Although 55% of the parents who responded agreed that the establishment of gifted classes would help improve the ‘quality’ of education in the county, 70% of them worried that pupils in general classes would be ignored, and 85% of them thought the pupils in primary schools would inevitably be forced into the competition for the entry of the junior high school gifted classes (H-C. Chien, 2007, p. C1). In other words, while Middle Line’s local educational authority intended to gain parents’ support with regard to the establishment of gifted classes, parents’ reservations about the equality of resource distribution and the competition created by the examination were also revealed.

As detailed in chapter 4, in response to the disputes about the establishment of gifted classes, the MOE consulted scholars and revised the regulations regarding the assessment of

gifted pupils and the organisation of gifted classes in 2006. Although Middle Line County's local educational authority still expressed a desire to establish more gifted classes in junior high schools, the regulations forced them to face the reality that not that many pupils were qualified to be placed in official gifted classes. It was found that the local educational authority in Middle Line later turned to encouraging the establishment of advanced weekend and after-school classes in junior high schools instead. In as early as 2004 after the mixed-ability grouping legislation had been passed, Middle Line County's local educational authority already stated that schools could establish advanced after-class and weekend courses for higher attaining pupils in order to 'maintain the competitiveness of the junior high schools in the county' (H-C. Chien, 2004, p. B2). In later sections it will be explained that due to the argument of 'differentiating outside normal school hours does not constitute a violation of the legislation', these extra classes become the mainstream method adopted by junior high schools to group higher attaining pupils.

One thing worth noting is that even though the local educational authority and some parents in Middle Line County seemed to support the use of streaming, the teachers' association at Middle Line County has opposed the use of streaming for a long time. The Middle Line County Teachers' Association also publicly argued that the MOE should clearly prohibit junior high schools from using different kinds of excuses to group pupils at weekends or after normal class hours. In fact, out of the national and local level teachers' associations, The Middle Line County Teachers' Association may have developed the most coherent arguments and the most systematic local actions to support the mixed-ability grouping policy.

In short, in Middle Line County, both the supporters and resisters of the mixed-ability grouping policy actively participated in the context of policy practice. While there was strong support from an individual teacher and also from The Middle Line County Teachers'

Association, the resistance from parent groups, school administrators, and also the equivocal attitudes of the local educational authority together complicated the practice of the policy in Middle Line. Under the circumstances, Individual schools may gain a certain amount of freedom to interpret the policy and to manipulate the practice based on it's within-school considerations.

8.3. The educators

The educators interviewed at North Creek include the principal, the director of teaching affairs and five teachers who teach the five main subjects. The table below shows the subjects taught, the teaching experience, the grades taught and the groups taught for every interviewee. It was found that on average the teachers at North Creek had less teaching experience than the interviewees at Pinewood and on average the teachers at North Creek were younger than the majority of the teachers at other junior high schools in Taiwan. Therefore, it was found that not all of the educators interviewed at North Creek had experience of teaching streamed classes. Further, although not every teacher interviewed had taught the advanced weekend class at the time of the interview, all of them had taught higher and lower attaining sets and all of them had experienced streamed school life when they were junior high school pupils.

Table 25: The educators interviewed at North Creek Junior High

The interviewees	Professional subject	Gender	Teaching experience (years)	The grades taught in 2007	If teaches weekend class
<i>Principal</i>	Integrated activity (Psychology major)	Male	21	N/A	N/A
<i>Director of teaching affairs</i>	Maths	Male	16	3 rd grade	No
<i>English teacher</i>	English	Female	19	2 nd grade	No
<i>Social studies teacher</i>	Civil Education	Male	15	3 rd grade	No
<i>Science teacher</i>	Science	Male	6	2 nd grade and 3 rd grade	Yes
<i>Maths teacher</i>	Maths	Male	5	2 nd grade and 3 rd grade	Yes
<i>Mandarin teacher</i>	Mandarin	Female	5	2 nd grade and 3 rd grade	No

The interviewees' general attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy are presented in the following paragraphs as the background information for the following discussions. Compared to the interviewees at Pinewood, the interviewees at North Creek were more flexible in relation to their attitudes towards the advantages and the disadvantages of the mixed-ability grouping policy. Therefore, when facing a mandate, they seemed to perceive the positive sides of the policy more easily while others may still be suspicious about the alleged disadvantages.

It is worth noting that in the last few years, the grouping practice at North Creek seemed to have had a decisive impact on educators' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy. In the last three years, North Creek has adopted mixed-ability grouping in normal school hours without using setting in any subject. Although special classes such as

advanced weekend classes and talented classes were still established, educators have argued that they have benefited from the advantages of using mixed-ability grouping. Further, according to the educators interviewed, the school was successful in relation to the senior high school entry rates because the adoption of mixed-ability grouping did not decrease pupils' academic performance. This result had eased school educators' worries about the negative effects of the mixed-ability grouping policy.

The principal at North Creek is middle-aged and he has many ideas about how to run a successful school. Ideally, he thought a junior high school should care about pupils' academic performance and also their all-round development. Therefore, he not only pushes pupils' academic performance hard, but also runs various activities within the schools. He was extremely proud that with his encouragement pupils participated in charity and environmental protection activities. He also felt satisfied that he had raised the level of academic performance in the school by attracting higher attaining pupils back from other schools. He admitted that he used to be in favour of using streaming. He was afraid that if the school's academic performance was not outstanding, the school's reputation would continue to go downhill. Nonetheless, he argued that after the three-year trial period (of using mixed-ability grouping in normal school hours), he was more confident with the policy nowadays and recognised the positive influences on the atmosphere in the school.

The director of teaching affairs is an experienced maths teacher. He has held the position of director of teaching affairs for four years and has witnessed the ongoing conflict about the adoption of different grouping practices. It is probably because of his position that he discussed the mixed-ability grouping policy from a practical point of view rather than from a personal point of view. For example, he argued that he did want the school to use setting a few years ago because it was common in junior high schools; but later when the mixed-ability grouping policy had been enforced through law, he decided that using

mixed-ability grouping might not be a bad idea. In his experience, discipline in the school has been improved since the school has adopted mixed-ability grouping and, in spite of what everyone thinks, academic performance does not decrease. Nonetheless, he mentioned that he felt pressurised under the mixed-ability grouping policy because the director of teaching affairs is the one who should be responsible for the academic performance of the school.

The English teacher has been teaching in junior high schools for 19 years. She has taught all kinds of classes before, from gifted classes to the so-called 'cow-raising classes'. She was also the director of the pupil counselling office and had only taught the gifted class at the time of the interview. She was personally in favour of the mixed-ability grouping policy but was also aware of parents' attitudes. She argued that because teenagers are sensitive enough to sense the different ways they are labelled, using streaming in junior high schools would inevitably negatively affect the majority of pupils. She remembered that when she was the deputy director of teaching affairs the teachers who taught higher streams actually detested the pupils in lower streams. She emphasised that teachers were also singled out when a school used streaming, which is a situation that the majority of teachers were unhappy with.

The social studies teacher interviewed in this study mainly taught the civil education class. He has taught for 15 years and used to teach streamed classes at the beginning of his teaching career. Because he has taught at North Creek for a long time, he knew a lot about the mixed-ability grouping policy conflicts. He talked about the conflicts in an analytical and detached manner so that he could provide arguments for different stances and even offer contrasting arguments. That is why at the beginning of the interview I had difficulties finding out what his 'own' opinions about the mixed-ability grouping policy were. For example, he stated that the current educational ideology is to cultivate well-rounded pupils rather than higher attaining ones, but he did not specify whether he agreed with this

argument. He also stated lots of advantages of using mixed-ability grouping. For instance, he thought using mixed-ability grouping would improve discipline and would not necessarily decrease pupils' academic performance, but in addition he also said that in order to improve the senior high school entry rate the school really needed to group higher attaining pupils. This is actually a common response pattern that I found in many of the interviews with the school educators, but the social studies teacher was the most obvious example. It is worth noting that he clearly stated that the retirement of old teachers (who support streaming) and to enforce the policy through law were crucial if changes were to take place. In his argument, new teachers were usually more capable of adapting to the differences, and to enforce the mixed-ability grouping policy through law could impose a strong influence on schools so that they may be more willing to use mixed-ability grouping.

The science teacher interviewed is young and energetic. He had taught the 2nd and 3rd grades at the time of the interview, and he was also a counsellor in the pupil counselling office. At the beginning of the interview he stated that he had given a lot of thought to this issue and had developed his own rationale. The key idea in his rationale is that in relation to the objectives of junior high level education, using mixed-ability grouping may not help improve pupils' acquisition of knowledge, but it could help to develop pupils' interaction skills and pupils' ability to solve problems. Although using mixed-ability grouping may not achieve all the objectives of junior high school education, overall he still supported its use. In other words, he separated the acquisition of knowledge (from textbooks) from the acquisition of 'ability', and he viewed the latter as more important in junior high level education. He was also very proud of his own class management skills and he stated that in teaching mixed-ability groups, he paid attention to pupils' discipline if pupils did not have a good academic performance.

The Mandarin teacher was the only educator interviewed at North Creek who strongly

contended that streaming was better for teaching. She was placed in a higher attaining class when she was a junior high school pupil and she felt it facilitated her learning. She argued that the disparity among pupils' abilities in mixed-ability groups was quite obvious and she usually worried that the higher attaining pupils' education may be sacrificed. She also emphasised that although there were advantages of using mixed-ability grouping, mainly in relation to discipline, many teachers complained about the higher attaining pupils not being looked after well enough. She was also more willing to talk about how the school grouped higher attaining pupils in the sport talented class instead of suggesting that the class was established according to regulations. In her argument, as long as the negative effects of the attainment-based differentiation, such as stigmatisation, could be eliminated, it was actually more effective to use banding or streaming in junior high level education.

The maths teacher interviewed in this study was also quite young. He stated that he hadn't really thought about this issue before because using mixed-ability grouping was already a policy when he started his teaching career. Further, from his point of view, school administrators had a lot more to say about the policy than teachers; thus he felt that he could only accept the school's policy. He thought that there were both advantages and disadvantages to mixed-ability grouping and streaming and he personally did not have a strong opinion about either of the grouping practices.

The following discussion is based on the interviews with the above educators and the survey of the principal that was conducted earlier. Interviewees' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy will be discussed first. Then, the current practice, the rationales of adopting the current practice and the difficulties faced by the schools will be explored. Later on in the chapter I will focus on understanding educators' perceptions of the senior high school entry system, pupils' ability, and teaching, which are crucial in shaping their attitudes and behaviour in the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy. How the

wider educational contexts have an impact on educators' perceptions and further the practice of the policy will also be discussed in the latter part of the chapter.

8.4. Educators' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy

As mentioned above, the fact that North Creek has adopted mixed-ability grouping without using setting in any subject in normal school hours for the last few years has had an impact on educators' attitudes and perceptions of the mixed-ability grouping policy. It can be seen that the educators interviewed constantly referred to their experiences in the last few years as examples to back up their arguments. In this section we can see that while the educators interviewed were aware of different concerns with regard to the mixed-ability grouping policy, the implementation so far has alleviated certain worries and has reinforced the positive experience. The change also gradually occurred with the re-assessment of different and sometimes contradictory concerns.

In the questionnaire survey conducted earlier, the principal at North Creek responded that he strongly supports the mixed-ability grouping policy and indicated that teachers at the school also support the adoption of mixed-ability grouping. The principal further indicated that the teachers implied that using mixed-ability grouping helped to 'normalise' their teaching because they were now able to make a similar amount of effort with all pupils.

In the interviews, the educators also discussed the mixed-ability grouping policy from various perspectives simultaneously, in a similar way to the educators at Pinewood Junior High. The educators at North Creek all adopted the 'equality perspective', the 'academic perspective' and the 'disciplinary perspective'. However, as will be seen below, the disciplinary perspective adopted by the educators at North Creek not only emphasised the disciplinary issue, it also highlighted academic concerns. This 'disciplinary-academic'

perspective was adopted by most of the educators interviewed at North Creek. It is with the combination of the disciplinary perspective and the academic perspective, the two seemingly opposite stances were combined and they together forged a discourse for educators to deal with the policy mandate and the demands for maintaining high pupil's attainments.

The 'equality perspective', which is argued the most in the context of the policy's influence, was mentioned by all of the educators interviewed. The fact that all of the them recognised that the lower attaining pupils were practically given up in a streamed system contributed to educators' sympathetic attitude towards the mixed-ability grouping policy. The following statements made by the educators interviewed reveal the 'equality perspective':

I used to notice that the teachers who were teaching low attaining classes not only taught the classes carelessly, but also implicitly despised the pupils. I do not think this should happen. I thought that by using mixed-ability grouping every class would get a fair amount of attention from their teachers. This would be very different to when teachers only cared about the higher attaining classes (the principal).

Mixed-ability grouping gives every pupil an equal chance to improve. Children will not feel frustrated by the 'lower attaining' tag they are labelled with and teachers would not have an excuse for giving up on lower attaining pupils (the English teacher interviewed).

Using mixed-ability grouping has a positive influence on the atmosphere in the classroom. I remember when we used streaming before, pupils were clearly divided into hierarchical streams and the pupils in the lower streams were in fact given up on from the beginning (the social studies teacher interviewed).

It has also been found that the educators at North Creek noticed the positive influences of using mixed-ability grouping. The English teacher and the principal both indicated that now teachers do not label or discriminate against pupils with lower attainments easily, as was the case previously. The English teacher explained:

Some teachers were actually afraid of lower attaining pupils in the old time, especially when they never got the chance to get to know them.

In short, the idea that lower attaining pupils should not be stereotyped and given up on contributes to the ‘equality perspective’.

The academic perspective, which argues that mixed-ability grouping complicates teaching in classrooms and fails the higher attaining pupils was also mentioned by the educators at North Creek Junior High. The Mandarin teacher interviewed had the strongest academic perspective out of all of the interviewees. She argued that the disparity between pupils’ abilities required different forms of teaching, either in set or in streamed classes. She also specifically pointed out the ‘loss’ of higher attaining pupils and how sorry she always felt for these pupils because she could not pay them the amount of attention they needed in mixed-ability classrooms. It is important to note that although the Mandarin teacher argued that many teachers felt the same way, she was the only educator interviewed at North Creek who expressed that she was in favour of streaming. Most of the interviewees at North Creek did not use the perspective as a way to oppose the mixed-ability grouping policy. For example, while both the English teacher interviewed and the science teacher interviewed mentioned that mixed-ability grouping may not only increase the difficulty of teaching, but also bore the higher attaining pupils, they both further explained that the academic perspective was one of the viewpoints that should be considered with other concerns.

The dominant discourse among the educators interviewed at North Creek is the ‘disciplinary-academic’ perspective. This perspective not only recognises the disciplinary effects of grouping practices, but also encompasses the academic influences. In a way, the successful experience of combining the two concerns is crucial in shaping educators’ current attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy at North Creek. The director of teaching affairs explained:

It is common sense that using mixed-ability grouping would definitely lower pupils' academic performance and improve discipline within schools; but our experience is that while discipline in the school has improved, pupils' academic performance has not necessarily declined.

In fact, most of the educators interviewed at North Creek agreed that good discipline is the foundation of creating satisfactory academic performance. The maths teacher interviewed stated:

Discipline is important to pupils' academic performance. The professors at the teacher training institution used to tell us that we need to handle the issue of discipline in the classroom first. As long as the discipline is under control, the class' academic performance will not be a problem.

The social studies teacher interviewed further explained:

It is because the atmosphere in a class is very important. When you see that everybody is studying, you will have the desire to study. Further, I think that teachers do put more effort into teaching mixed-ability groups, which helps to retain discipline and a good academic performance. Previously, many teachers practically gave up when they were assigned to teach lower attaining classes.

Most importantly, the 'good discipline helps to enhance attainments' contention is backed up by pupils' attainments in last few years. The principal pointed out:

The result we got from the last year's senior high school entry examination was that we had more pupils entering highest-ranking senior high school than previous years. I think it is because when we used mixed-ability grouping, the whole school works hard to get good grades. It used to be only a few classes working really hard.

We can see that the discipline-academic perspective utilised at North Creek tactfully refutes part of the academic perspective—the part that emphasises that mixed-ability grouping would lower pupils' attainment, but incorporates its main concern—pupil's academic performance into the argument. In other words, the concern about the senior high school entry rate is actually taken seriously rather than being neglected, and this perspective

provides valid and stronger grounds for educators to support the mixed-ability grouping policy.

To sum up, several points should be noted about the educators' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy at North Creek. First, it is evident that all of the educators interviewed were aware of the perspectives commonly utilised to react to the policy, just like the educators at Pinewood. Educators did not necessarily agree with all of them, but they were used to mention various perspectives simultaneously to discuss the issue. In an analytical sense, this pattern of discussion reveals that the educators were aware of the conflicts over the mixed-ability grouping policy, and that they wanted to be recognised as making a carefully weighed up choice.

Secondly, it is important to note that whilst the educators interviewed seemed to gradually accept the use of mixed-ability grouping, it does not mean that they were against the use of streaming. The most commonly mentioned argument about using streaming will be valid as long as the negative conditions can be improved is clear evidence. Further, we can see that some perspectives need to be promoted in order to enter school educators' discourse. For example, although many educators were long aware of the unequal learning environment in lower attaining classrooms when the school used streaming, it was not until the mixed-ability grouping legislation was passed, which delivered a clear message of promoting the equality within schools, that the equality perspective became powerful. From this perspective, it can be inferred that educators' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy could be changed with the reconfiguration of various concerns. In the case at North Creek Junior High, the passing of the mixed-ability grouping legislation and the fact that using mixed-ability grouping has not decreased pupils' attainments together gave rise to a more positive attitude towards the policy among school educators.

Nonetheless, as can be seen from the above discussion and also in later sections, pupils'

academic performance is crucial, not only to educators' attitudes about the mixed-ability grouping policy, but also to decisions made in the school about grouping practice. The discourse used to support the mixed-ability grouping policy—the disciplinary-academic perspective, closely connects the concern about discipline in schools to the worries about pupils' academic performance. This discourse gives rise to a doubt about whether educators' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy would be altered if pupils' academic performance diminished in the future, and if the ideals of using mixed-ability grouping could be realised without considering academic performance.

In next section, the decision-making process with regard to grouping practice at North Creek Junior High will be presented. It will be demonstrated that although the principal of North Creek emphasised that they adopt the 'true' mixed-ability grouping, which refers to using mixed-ability grouping without using setting in any subjects, North Creek still has advanced weekend classes and a controversial talented class for grouping higher attaining pupils. The process, the rationales and the disputes over the grouping practices at North Creek will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

8.5. The current grouping practice and decision-making concerns

At the time of the interview, North Creek mainly used mixed-ability grouping for all three grades without using setting in any subject in normal schools hours; and similar to Pinewood Junior High, North Creek also provided advanced weekend classes to a limited number of pupils. Although the principal emphasised that all pupils could sign up for the advanced weekend classes, the director of teaching affairs indicated that due to the limited number of spaces, they used high attainment to choose the weekend class participants. Further, North Creek also had a few special classes. At the time of the interviews, it had one sport-talented classes (in the 1st grade), one academically gifted class, one special class for

pupils who had dropped out of school and one vocational class. According to the principal, all of the special classes were established and grouped based on the relevant regulations. By the time I had finished my interviews, North Creek was recruiting new pupils for the next academic year's 1st grade sport-talented class.

During the interviews, the principal at North Creek kept arguing that North Creek was 'truly' implementing the mixed-ability grouping policy because it only adopted mixed-ability grouping in normal school hours. Even setting by subjects, which is permitted by the mixed-ability grouping legislation and utilised by many schools was not adopted at North Creek. However, the process that North Creek Junior High has been through to be able to implement the current grouping practice was not without conflict.

According to the principal and the director of teaching affairs, North Creek did use setting after the mixed-ability grouping legislation was passed. They indicated that the school even used setting in the 1st grade, which was not permitted by the mixed-ability grouping legislation. The principal explained:

It was difficult for us to turn streaming into mixed-ability grouping at that time. You know, when the other schools were all using streaming, following the legislation would have had negative consequences. Since most parents think that streaming will lead to higher academic performance, we may lose pupil intake if we do not use streaming. Further, our overall pupils' attainments may also decrease due to the loss of higher attaining pupils. It is just like a 'vicious circle' created by the adoption of mixed-ability grouping. That is why at that time we selected 10% of the pupils in the 1st grade to form the higher attaining classes for the purpose of showing parents our determination to improve pupils' academic performance.

The director of teaching affairs also used the same argument to explain the school's decision of using setting in the 1st grade at that time. He argued that while other schools claimed that they used streaming, parents questioned the school's grouping practice and demanded the school to use streaming.

In relation to this matter, the principal and the director of teaching affairs had practical concerns. They were worried about the consequences of the parents' demands and the subsequent actions. Similar to the responses I obtained from Pinewood, at North Creek the educators interviewed also argued that some parents' obsession about pupils' academic performance and the way they transferred their children out based on the number of pupils the school has sent to the highest-ranking high schools puts junior high schools in a difficult position.

As discussed in the previous chapter, although parental choice of junior high schools is limited in Taiwan³⁹, changing children's registration of address in order to enrol children at the ideal primary and junior high schools is common practice. This phenomenon has been highlighted by several researchers (D-R. Chang, 1998; P-J. Chiang, 2004; S-M. Chou, 2001; D-Y. Huang, 2006; D-Y. Huang, 2008), who have argued that the relatively small cost of changing children's registration of address compared to buying a house in a popular catchment area facilitates the self-initiated parental choice of schools (D-Y. Huang, 2006; D-Y. Huang, 2008). It has also been discovered that most parents in Taiwan, especially the ones with a higher educational and socio-economic status support the concept of parental choice (C-M. Li, 2007).

As can be seen, the self-initiated 'market' that values the highest-ranking senior high school entry rate also influenced the grouping practice at North Creek. According to the principal and the director of teaching affairs, the concern over the 'market-mechanism', which makes junior high schools compete over pupil intake, contributed to the illegal adoption of setting (in the 1st grade) at North Creek a few years ago. At that time, North

³⁹ In the Taiwanese education system, parents only have a limited choice of primary and junior high schools. Only about 10% of pupils go to private schools by parental choice. Most primary school graduates are assigned to public junior high schools based on their household registration. The system used to be straightforward in that each catchment area only had one junior high school for several feeder primary schools; it was only after 2001 that the system was gradually revised so that in some local counties parents could choose from two or three schools within one catchment area.

Creek used a complicated method to set pupils. The 12 classes in the 1st grade were divided into three groups, within which four sets were established (A, B, C and D). In other words, there was a four-tier hierarchy established among the pupils and also among the teachers who taught these classes. According to the educators interviewed, initially most of teachers did not have a strong opinion about the setting practice. This may be because ‘setting’ was generally viewed as an acceptable replacement to streaming. While educators still had doubts about adopting mixed-ability grouping, which is mandated by legislation, setting was an acceptable solution. Nonetheless, in North Creek’s case, the ‘compromise’ did not work as well as expected which gave rise to debates about grouping practice within the school. At that time, the teachers were in dispute about several issues. The first issue concerned discipline within the schools. The science teacher interviewed recalled:

We think discipline within the school actually worsened when the pupils had to rush to different classrooms for their set classes. Teachers often found that classrooms became messy and equipment was sabotaged or stolen. Some teachers even wanted to ban the lower attaining class pupils from using their classrooms.

The second dispute was related to class management. The director of teaching affairs explained:

Many teachers complained that they did not have enough time to get acquainted with the pupils in their classes. With pupils grouped in different sets for the whole morning, the teachers felt that both the pupils and the teachers had lost their sense of belonging. You know, it is the same in the army because soldiers need to feel that they belong to a specific group.

A similar point was also argued by the English teacher and the science teacher. They believed that if pupils could feel attached to a specific group, it would be easier for teachers to manage the classroom and to cultivate an atmosphere that was conducive for learning. It should be noted that in all Taiwanese schools, from primary to senior high schools, the

patriarchal management system has had a long tradition. Pupils are usually placed into specific classes with their own leading teacher, and the leading teacher not only teaches his/her class, but is also responsible for the overall progress of the entire class. For example, the discipline and the academic performance of the class are all considered to be the responsibility of the leading teacher. Also, using classes as a unit for various within-school competitions (e.g. discipline, the cleanness of classrooms, and average academic performance) is common in Taiwanese schools. The idea of cultivating pupils' sense of belonging plays an important role in Taiwanese education. This may be why classroom management is considered to be so crucial by educators at North Creek.

Moreover, a conflict among teachers with regard to who could teach what sets became another focus in the discussion about grouping practice. The social studies teacher interviewed recalled:

Teachers actually had different thoughts about the ideal sets they wanted to teach. Some teachers were afraid of being labelled as bad teachers if they were assigned to teach the lower sets, but others preferred to teach the lower sets because teaching lower sets is less pressurised.⁴⁰ These conflicting thoughts made it difficult to assign teachers to groups.

According to the director of teaching affairs, although all of the above concerns were proposed and privately discussed in the first year after the passing of the mixed-ability grouping legislation, the principal actually wanted to continue using setting. The principal believed that the use of setting was a way to show parents that the school was concerned about the pupils' academic performance at that time. Nonetheless, teachers started to utilise the power of the teachers' association to collect opinions and to act collectively. The director of teaching affairs recalled that the chairman of the school teachers' association approached

⁴⁰ Some teachers thought that teaching lower attaining classes meant they wouldn't have to put very much effort into improving pupils' academic performance because no one would expect much from them. In a way it is a lot less pressurised.

him and the principal to discuss the possibility of abolishing setting. The principal also recalled that he convened several school-wide meetings to discuss the matter and later to vote on the school's grouping practice. According to the science teacher interviewed, even though not all of the teachers opposed setting, some teachers were determined that there would be changes. Therefore, although the principal and the director of teaching affairs were hesitant about ceasing the use of setting, after a school-wide vote where more teachers supported the abolition of setting, the school administrators had no other choice but to use mixed-ability grouping on a trial basis. The English teacher interviewed stated:

You could say that teachers' opinions were valued at our school, but we know that the principal felt extremely pressurised because of parents' demands and due to the competition with other schools.

The statement of the English teacher interviewed reveals the key policy stakeholders in the process of decision-making—teachers, school administrators, and also parents; In relation to this matter, the way in which the teachers raised a school-wide issue and made demands through the teachers' association has had a crucial influence on the final decision. According to a few of the educators interviewed, school administrators had suggested the use of setting several times in the last few years, but all of their proposals were rejected by teachers.

It is worth noting that the composition of school teachers may contribute to the adoption of mixed-ability grouping at North Creek. The principal and the director of teaching affairs both assumed that the more progressive teacher training that was provided after the education reform endowed many young teachers with the flexibility to accept different kinds of grouping practice. The argument that put forward in chapter 4 that the changing mainstream educational ideologies may influence the ideology held by first-line educators and the policy practice of schools is thus supported by the above observation.

Moreover, it can be inferred that to enforce the mixed-ability grouping policy through law did influence the decision about grouping practice at North Creek. After the legislation was passed in 2004, North Creek decided to change its grouping practice from streaming to setting, and then to mixed-ability grouping. Further, while the teachers' desire to have a 'whole' class whole day for the purpose of creating a sense of 'belonging' for pupils may be used as reason for re-adopting streaming, it is under the constraint of the mixed-ability legislation that the school has no choice but to adopt mixed-ability grouping, which still keeps the same pupils in the same classroom during most of school hours.

Nonetheless, worries about parents' demands and the concerns about pupils' academic performance were still present. North Creek thus employed various 'attainment-raising' strategies after the decision to primarily adopt mixed-ability grouping in normal schools hours was made. With regard to grouping practice, although North Creek used mixed-ability grouping in normal school hours, it still established advanced weekend classes for a limited number of pupils. Again, the school administrators argued that the establishment of these classes was because of parents' demands. While in normal school hours most teachers decided to use mixed-ability grouping without setting, school administrators and also teachers recognised the need to secure a satisfactory academic performance.

At the time of the interview, there were four advanced weekend classes in total. Pupils in these classes had to go to school on Saturdays where the 2nd grade pupils had four one hour lessons and the 3rd grade pupils had eight one hour lessons. According to the director of teaching affairs, although the school's policy is that anyone who wants to participate in the advanced weekend classes can sign up for them, they still used academic performance as the criterion to select pupils. The result is that two classes were viewed as the advanced class and the others were perceived to be a remedial class. In the advanced classes, the five main subjects were taught according to a schedule for the purpose of boosting pupils' test scores.

For the director of teaching affairs and the principal, establishing advanced weekend classes has become a necessary part of running junior high schools that the school needs to use the classes to ease parents' worries about pupils' academic performance.

In addition to the advanced weekend class, North Creek also has a sport-talented class. As previously explained, the establishment of talented classes in junior high schools was said to be a disguise for the traditional higher attaining classes, which gave rise to the revision of relevant regulations. The teachers at North Creek also questioned the reason behind the establishment of sport-talented class.

According to the principal, the sport-talented class at North Creek was established with the local educational authority's permission to recruit pupils who were talented at table tennis, tennis, woodball and judo. He emphasised that the establishment and the running of the sport-talented class at North Creek followed the regulations strictly. However, the principal did not deny that the talented class was established because of parents' demands and that parents believed the sport-talented class to be on the same level as the higher attaining class. Some teachers also found that the parents in neighbourhood communities inferred that the sport-talented class actually recruited many higher attaining pupils from neighbouring primary schools. The Mandarin teacher remembered how one of her colleagues was surprised that some parents were well aware of the average academic performance of the pupils that were enrolled in the sport talented class. She said:

The parents simply refuted my colleague's argument about the sport-talented class is a 'real' talented class and indicated that many of the higher attaining pupils from the feeder primary schools were actually in the sport talented class.

According to several of the teachers interviewed, the school administrators had attempted to explain the teachers' doubts. The following statement that was made by the social studies teacher interviewed is a typical response from the administrators. He

explained:

Some special classes do group the higher attaining pupils. But this is because in order to master certain sports such as tennis, pupils inevitably need to take private lessons before entering junior high schools. The pupils who have the opportunity to take these lessons usually come from families with a higher socio-economic status and they also tend to perform well in academic subjects.

He also emphasised:

Although in our school we do establish and operate the class according to the relevant regulations, I know many schools just use special classes to group higher attaining pupils and to focus on boosting their academic performance. Parents and pupils do not complain about this because they also consider the talented classes to be the same as the former higher attaining class.

The establishment of the sport-talented class and the explanation provided by school administrators reveal an undetected but questionable phenomenon that the school is actually providing extra resources to those who already have more resources at home. Whilst the school educators interviewed did not deny that the sport-talented class usually presented higher academic performance and received higher expectation from teachers, it is reasonable to doubt that whether the sport-talented class becomes an official channel for higher SES family to obtain extra resource. A similar finding is reported in a recent study which compared the education provided in general classes and the education provided in the art-talented class at one junior high school in Taiwan (Y-H. Hsu, 2005). This study found that not only did the pupils in the art-talented class mainly come from middle- or upper-class families; the school teachers also had high expectations towards art-talented class pupils' academic performance, instead of expecting them to develop their artistic talents.

In short, we can see that by balancing parents' demands, teachers' requests and the administrators' own considerations, the grouping practice that has been adopted at North Creek was viewed by the educators interviewed as an acceptable compromise. Especially

after the success related to the senior high school entry rate in 2008, the ‘disciplinary-academic’ perspective was held firmly by many educators in discussing their attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy.

Further, if we put educators’ arguments to one side and just focus on the grouping practice adopted by North Creek, it is obvious that the strategies adopted by Pinewood (as demonstrated in chapter 7), including the establishment of advanced weekend classes and special classes, have also been adopted by North Creek. In other words, the difference in attitudes of school educators did not prevent the school from grouping higher attaining pupils and pursuing the higher senior high school entry rate. This reveals that in practice, the academic perspective, which emphasises pupils’ academic performance, is surpassing all the other perspectives that are adopted by educators to discuss the mixed-ability grouping policy. In the following section, educators’ concerns regarding pupils’ academic performance will be explored further by investigating educators’ perceptions of the senior high school entry system and its influence on the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy.

8.6. Educators’ perceptions of the senior high school entry system and policy practice

At North Creek, educators’ perceptions of the senior high school entry system and their perceptions of the reform of the system are similar to the perceptions of the educators interviewed at Pinewood. Most of them indicated that although the reform has amended some flaws in the system, the key characteristics of the system, which are the main contributors of the pressure that burdens the schools, have not been removed.

The reform of the examination contents were welcomed by most educators interviewed at North Creek. They indicated that the contents of the senior high school entry examination are now easier and primarily focus on testing pupils’ basic knowledge and abilities. The

science teacher stated that he provided the same teaching materials to all pupils in mixed-ability classrooms without providing additional advanced materials for higher attaining pupils because the new examination is not as difficult as it used to be. The Mandarin teacher, the maths teacher and the social studies teacher all expressed the same opinion. The social studies teacher and the maths teacher also stated that as long as pupils made an effort to familiarise themselves with the contents of the textbook, they would obtain high test scores in the examination regardless of their previous attainments. However, as argued by the educators at Pinewood, the educators interviewed at North Creek also thought that the main problem attributed to the senior high school entry examination was parents' obsession with pupils' academic performance.

You know, in Taiwan it is customary for parents to want their children to go to the best school and to get the best education possible. So parents care a lot about their children's academic performance and put pressure on schools (the maths teacher interviewed).

Parents think that getting good examination results is important. They also think that children placed in the higher attaining classes will get better teachers and better classmates. Currently, parents still demand that schools to establish more special classes such as sport talented classes and music talented classes (the science teacher interviewed).

In Taiwan it is normal for people to have aspirations to enter the most advanced schools. As long as there are 'star' senior high schools, people will compete for places at them because their children's education is important to them (the social studies teacher interviewed).

Further, similar to at Pinewood, parents' obsession about the number of pupils the school sends to the highest-ranking senior high schools was said to have negative consequences on schools, such as to lose pupil intake to private schools and to other public schools. Although North Creek were having a stable pupil intake at the time of research, school administrators were still aware that there had been a serious drop in pupil intake a

few years ago. The social studies teachers recalled:

Our feeder primary schools usually have around 500 graduates. Now, we normally recruit around 400 of them, but we used to only recruit about 300 pupils because the parents decided to enrol their children at private schools.

Moreover, it is clear that the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy is highly relevant to schools' senior high school entry rate. One example is that the principal and the director of teaching affairs both emphasised that they were very nervous the first time the pupils who were placed in mainly mixed-ability groups took the senior high school entry examination. The director of teaching affairs stated:

I remember at that time (2007), we were so worried before they took the examination because they had done poorly in the previous practice examinations.⁴¹ The pupils that year were the ones that we had recruited by offering them a scholarship. They were the high ability pupils. So if they had done badly, we would have had to reconsider our grouping practice.

The principal expressed that he has known for a long time that if he wants to defend the mixed-ability grouping policy, he needs to maintain a high senior high school entry rate. Therefore, after North Creek decided to mainly use mixed-ability grouping in normal school hours, the principal and the director of teaching affairs quickly developed a number of strategies in order to increase and maintain a satisfactory academic performance.

First, North Creek puts effort into recruiting the academically able pupils. The director of teaching affairs stated that they once offered a scholarship for pupils at primary schools with high average scores; and both he and the principal regularly visited the parents whose children had a high attainment at the feeder primary schools to persuade them to enrol their children at North Creek. It is evident that under the circumstances, although pupils are not clearly differentiated between each other at school, they are singled out before they start

⁴¹ Pupils usually take several practice examinations before taking the senior high school entry examination in Taiwan.

school based on their ability to contribute to the academic performance of the school. While the educators argued that almost all of the junior schools used recruitment strategies to attract the higher attaining pupils for the purpose of creating schools' high senior high school entry rate, it can be seen that pupils are commoditised based on their potential to contribute to the schools' overall achievement (Ball, 2004; Gewirtz et al., 1995).

Another strategy used by North Creek was to encourage the teachers to make more of an effort to raise pupils' academic performance. At North Creek, all pupils stay until the eighth period Monday to Friday to have extra lessons or to study. This is an additional period after normal school hours. Although the principal argued that it is more like a routine which is adopted by all the junior high schools in Middle Line County, the idea that pupils need to spend more time to study is in itself a strategy to improve pupils' academic performance. Further, at North Creek the use of mixed-ability grouping has unexpectedly created a school-wide atmosphere where the teachers have a shared mission of raising pupils' attainments. The English teacher interviewed stated:

To put it another way, using mixed-ability grouping also puts pressure on teachers. This is because now everyone has a class of pupils with similar abilities, so teachers have no excuse but to work harder to raise the overall attainments of the classes. Just last weekend I saw several teachers asking pupils to come to school to study. I know many teachers often come to school at the weekend in order to supervise pupils' study.

The English teacher also explained:

We all hope that the academic performance of our pupils will be satisfactory while we are using mixed-ability grouping, otherwise the decision to use mixed-ability grouping may be overturned. I can definitely tell you that if one day we have fewer pupils entering the highest-ranking senior high schools, we will immediately lose a large number of pupils and probably go back to use streaming. I really think it is parents' attitudes towards the senior high school entry system that should be changed, not teachers'.

In short, in common with the perceptions of educators at Pinewood the educators

interviewed at North Creek argued that the influence of the senior high school entry system is mediated through anxious parents. It has been demonstrated that North Creek put a great deal of effort into fulfilling parents' needs, and the adoption of mixed-ability grouping at North Creek was still overshadowed by the emphasis on pupils' academic performance.

8.7. Educators' perceptions of pupils' ability, teaching and the practice of the policy

As suggested in the previous chapter, although educators' perceptions of pupils' ability and teaching in mixed-ability groups are found as influencing educators' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping innovation (Ball, 1981; Reid et al., 1981), the discussion with regard to how these perceptions are formed within its wider contexts still require further exploration. This section will report the exploration of educators' perceptions of pupils' ability and teaching in mixed-ability groups at North Creek Junior High. The questions raised are the same as those in the previous chapter which include: how do educators perceive pupils' ability and teaching in mixed-ability groups when they discuss the advantages and disadvantages of different grouping practices? Do these perceptions influence educators' attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy? Are these perceptions held by educators influenced by the wider educational contexts, for example the senior high entry system and the development of the education system in Taiwan?

8.7.1. The perceptions of pupils' ability and policy practice

The descriptions of pupils' ability were nearly identical at North Creek, as almost every educator interviewed indicated there were 'smarter pupils' and 'pupils who are not as smart'. The smart ones were described as having a better comprehension of learning materials and the not so smart ones were usually the slow learners. These terms were found being used

extensively when the educators interviewed argued that the school inevitably needed ‘smart pupils’ to raise the average academic performance. It can be seen that whilst educators paralleled ‘smart pupils’ with ‘having higher attainments’, their perceptions of pupils’ ability were primarily determined by pupils’ academic performance.

There was also an academic versus vocational dichotomy that was commonly used by North Creek educators to describe pupils’ ability. For example, the maths teacher and the science teacher both stated that pupils who have a lower academic performance may have other merits in ‘vocational matters’. The science teacher explained:

I think the lower academic attaining pupils may not be motivated to learn academic subjects, but they may be interested in vocational subjects and have the ability to learn vocational skills.

In short, the educators interviewed at North Creek also believe that pupils have an innate ability that is fixed (Dweck, 1999; Prawat, 1992), and the difference between pupils’ abilities can be detected from pupils’ academic performance.

However, it has also been found that while discussing pupils’ academic performance, several of the educators interviewed provided further thoughts about the ‘conditions’ that may have an impact on pupils’ attainments or prevent the pupils from achieving their potential. Three conditions were frequently mentioned: the pupils’ family background, pupils’ learning in primary schools and the complicated relationship between the academic performance and pupils’ motivation to learn.

First, several of the teachers interviewed mentioned that they were aware of the relationship between pupils’ family background and their academic performance. The Mandarin teacher and the English teacher both suggested that the pupils with an inferior academic performance tended to come from families with a lower socio-economic status and that these parents may pay less attention to their children’s education. They were aware

that this was a practical problem for pupils and that it may affect their learning.

The second condition that was argued by several teachers was that some primary schools did not sufficiently prepare their pupils to study new materials at junior high schools. Therefore, the imbalanced quality of education provided by different primary schools or just by different leading teachers created a performance gap between pupils. The social studies teacher stated:

The foundations laid by primary schools are important for pupils to be able to study at junior high schools. Take maths for example, if pupils cannot handle a simple calculation, it would be impossible for them to keep up with new mathematical concepts. As for social studies, it is evident that if pupils have not received enough background knowledge for further study at their primary school, they usually need more help.

The Mandarin teacher provided an example. She found that the differences between pupils' writing abilities partially resulted from the differing demands of their Mandarin teachers at primary school. She stated:

Some primary school teachers pay close attention to pupils' use of sentences and punctuation marks, but some teachers just do not care about these details; the difference in the amount of emphasis teachers put on these details influences pupils' basic writing abilities.

With regard to the third condition, some teachers argued that the mutual influence on pupils' motivation to learn and their academic performance might hinder some pupils' chances of achieving their potential. The maths teachers stated that when pupils' get low grades in classes, they become less motivated and get lower grades. He explained:

Pupils' ability in maths is accumulated; but if they are not motivated from the start they tend to get lower grades. Then they do not have any motivation to catch up. It is just too difficult.

The English teacher also explained:

I remember when I used to teach the cow-raising class, the kids in the class had no motivation to learn. I figured it was because they had been clearly labelled so they felt that they did not have the ability to learn.

It can be inferred from the above accounts that there was a reflection of educators at North Creek upon the rigid differentiation between pupils' abilities. Even though most of the educators interviewed at North Creek still used pupils' attainments as the criteria to identify pupils' abilities and dichotomously categorised pupils' ability into academic and vocational, they were also aware that pupils' attainments may be influenced by other external conditions.

Whilst the educators at North Creek expressed more diverse perceptions of pupils' ability compared to the educators at Pinewood, it is worth noting that the teachers at North Creek are generally younger and most of them have been aware of the mixed-ability grouping policy from the start of their teaching career. It is possible that these educators were influenced more by the educational ideologies promoted after the abolition of Martial Law that emphasises individual development rather than solely on the development of the country, which contributes to their more sophisticated perceptions of pupils' ability. Further, it would be useful to reiterate here that most of these teachers have been mainly teaching in mixed-ability groups for more than three years. This fact raises a question about whether educators' perceptions of pupils' abilities have influenced their practice of the mixed-ability policy or whether the experience of teaching in mixed-ability groups has allowed them to view pupils' ability differently. In this case, it may be not only the educators' perceptions that contribute to the adoption of a reform; the implementation of the reform may also subtly influence school educators' perceptions. The common argument put forward by educators at North Creek—'others do not know the advantages of mixed-ability grouping because they never really use it'—explains this influence.

8.7.2. The perceptions of teaching in mixed-ability groups and policy practice

In general, although interviewees' perceptions of teaching were still confined by the senior high school entry examination, there were more teachers interviewed at North Creek who did not think teaching mixed-ability groups was more difficult than teaching streamed classes based on their experience of teaching in mixed-ability groups and the recognition of the reform of the examination.

In common with the response I obtained from Pinewood junior high, when asked about teaching in mixed-ability groups, the educators interviewed at North Creek mentioned the level and the amount of materials that can be chosen but not the teaching methods adopted. Among the educators interviewed at North Creek, the majority chose middle level or upper middle level materials to teach mixed-ability groups. The difference between the responses from the educators at North Creek and the educators at Pinewood was that almost every educator interviewed at North Creek explained how they tried to take care of both higher and lower attaining pupils:

Although I told all the pupils in my class that I could only take care of the majority of them and that I would only be providing middle level teaching materials, I did also provide extra materials for the higher attaining pupils in case they felt bored, and I gave the lower attaining pupils extra exercises for the purpose of building up their basic skills (the Mandarin teacher interviewed).

I do not think teaching mixed-ability groups only means teaching middle level materials. It depends on the teachers and there is a possibility of including advanced materials. For example, although we now generally use commercial exam books, I always include some difficult questions for the higher attaining pupils to answer. I also ask the lower attaining students to stay behind after the class or in the break so I can give them extra instructions (the director of teaching affairs, the maths teacher).

My initial goal is always to teach the middle level pupils and then I provide other

resources for the pupils with higher or lower attainments. I use simpler vocabulary and sentences to produce my own teaching materials for pupils in mixed-ability group, but I also provide difficult questions for higher attaining ones (the English teacher interviewed).

I mainly use upper middle level materials in mixed-ability classes because I think they are suitable for at least three quarters of the pupils in mixed-ability classes. I also think these materials are sufficient to prepare the higher attaining pupils to gain satisfactory scores in the senior high school entry examination (the science teacher interviewed).

As for the 'methods' being used, the educators at North Creek responded in the same way as those at Pinewood, none of the educators interviewed specified their teaching methods until the questions were elaborated. It was found that all of them mainly used whole-class teaching to teach mixed-ability groups. Interaction between teachers and pupils was encouraged but this was mainly confined to getting pupils to ask questions. The educators interviewed at North Creek did not mention any other teaching methods. The science teacher and the Mandarin teacher stated that the lack of time, the large amount of textbook materials, and the large class sizes were the main reasons that most teachers used dictation and whole-class teaching.

In addition, it is worth noting that the teachers interviewed at North Creek seemed to have more confidence in facing the senior high school entry examination. It may be due to their perceptions of the revised contents of the examination so that several of the teachers interviewed stated that using middle-level materials was sufficient to prepare students for the big examination. Further, the experience of North Creek educators in the last few years has been that the senior high school entry rate was not affected by using mixed-ability grouping. In this case, although the educators were still aware of the influence of the senior high entry examination on their teaching, they adopted a different viewpoint to explain its influence. The revised contents of the senior high school entry examination and the possibility of maintaining high pupils' attainment in mixed-ability groups were emphasised

by the educators interviewed at North Creek.

Finally, to answer my research question about teaching in mixed-ability groups, it is still difficult to decide whether educators' perceptions of teaching affect their attitudes and actions towards the mixed-ability grouping policy, or whether the practice of the policy influences educators' attitudes towards the policy and their perceptions of teaching. It seems that at North Creek, the alleged difficulty of teaching in mixed-ability grouping gradually disappeared after teachers developed a pattern of teaching in mixed-ability groups under the demand of the policy, so did the strong doubts over the adoption of the mixed-ability grouping policy. The principal recalled that when they decided to group pupils in mixed-ability classes five years ago, the teachers complained that they found it difficult to teach heterogeneous classes, but after gaining some experience of teaching these classes, the teachers started to develop their own teaching patterns. He stated:

We now think that teachers must have the ability to take care of pupils with different abilities in the same class. This is the profession that teachers should have. It cannot be like in the old days when teachers only focussed on teaching higher attaining pupils and gave up on the rest who were actually the majority of the class.

8.8. Summary

This chapter has discussed the educators' attitudes towards and the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy at North Creek Junior High. It was found that although the educators interviewed at North Creek had contradictory opinions about the rationales and the effects of the policy, most of them concluded that mixed-ability grouping helps to improve the school's discipline which further contributes to the school-wide learning atmosphere and a stable academic performance. It has been demonstrated that this 'disciplinary-academic' perspective plays a crucial role in North Creeks' educators' attitudes towards the policy and in the decision the school made about the mixed-ability grouping

policy.

North Creek also established advanced weekend classes, which group higher attaining pupils and a controversial sport-talented class. Educators at North Creek argued that these special arrangements were made due to the unavoidable pressure imposed by the parents and the senior high school entry examination. The fact that the principal at North Creek emphasised that the school needs to perform well in the senior high school entry examination in order to ensure the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy demonstrates the influence of the senior high school examination, and also the politics resulted from parents' desire to gain advantage from the examination from schools' special arrangements.

Further, it is evident that the senior high school entry examination influences the educators' perceptions of pupils' abilities. The way teachers perceived pupils' ability was mainly based on pupils' academic performance. Simple dichotomies, such as smart or not and academic versus vocational were commonly used by educators to describe higher and lower attaining pupils.

At this point it is appropriate to discuss the effect of the mandate on the practice of the policy at North Creek. At North Creek, the educators argued that the mandate allowed the school to reject some unreasonable requests. Some of the educators interviewed even stated that the MOE should also prohibit the establishment of advanced weekend classes so that junior high schools would not be competing with each other to adopt different kinds of 'higher attaining pupil grouping strategies'. In other words, while some people may view the educational mandate as being too ideal or unpractical, which is a discourse that the resisters of the mixed-ability grouping policy commonly use, at North Creek some of the educators viewed the mandate as an opportunity to implement a well-intended policy. This finding shows that mandates can be interpreted as both a restriction and an opportunity,

depending on how first-line educators utilise it based on their own ideologies.

Finally, it is important to highlight that the discovery that North Creek educators had a more positive attitude towards the mixed-ability grouping policy is relevant to the fact that the educators at North Creek were more amenable to the discourse utilised in the educational reform in the post-Martial Law period. As discussed above, the young age of the educators at North Creek, which is related to the educators' training and their awareness of the mixed-ability grouping policy, may contribute to the policy implementation. It was found that the younger educators interviewed all argued they knew that the rationale of using mixed-ability grouping is to facilitate the equality of learning opportunities within schools, which is a key point the education reform has attempted to promote. It is thus easier for them to adapt than the educators who were more used to teaching streamed classes.

Further, it has been found that the younger educators seemed to pay more attention to the reform policies. For example, when discussing the reform of the senior high school entry system, the younger educators were more likely to acknowledge the intentions of the reform, and were more willing to make adjustments in line with the reform. The ways the educators interviewed described their choice of teaching materials and the rationales of the reformed examination contents were concrete examples.

Moreover, although there were no notable changes to the teaching methods, the intention to put more effort into caring for pupils with both higher and lower attainments is different from putting emphasis on the education of the higher attaining pupils. In other words, the transformed educational ideologies after the abolition of Martial Law have influenced the young educators at North Creek either through the reformed teacher training or the discussion in society; and this influence seems to have helped the young educators to be more open-minded about the debates on different educational ideologies and to be more adaptable to new educational policies.

Chapter 9 : Conclusion and Discussion

This research investigates the conflicts over the controversial mixed-ability grouping policy. The conflicts over mixed-ability grouping in schools have been well-documented in the UK and the US, but this issue is still developing and is under-studied in Taiwan. Moreover, the phenomenon that junior high schools in Taiwan utilise ‘disguised forms’ to group higher attaining pupils to, on the one hand, conform to the policy but, on the other hand, to resist it through loopholes has rarely been discussed in existing literature. Starting from an intuitive question: Why has not the mixed-ability grouping policy been implemented as expected in such a long time?, this study explored the mixed-ability grouping policy over a long-term perspective and examined the process of the policy through three dimensions that touched upon the influence of the wider educational contexts, the governing issues, and the ideological and practical concerns.

First, bearing in mind that the process of educational policy is inseparable from the ‘big picture’ (Ozga, 2000) and that it is complex and filled with conflicts (Bowe et al.,1992; Honig, 2006; Malen & Knapp, 1997; Mosen-Low et al., 2009; Taylor et al.,1997), this study utilised the framework developed by Hodgson and Spours to explore not only the ideological debates and the conflicts between the interests of different policy actors, but also the contexts that shape the above conflicts over the policy over time (Hodgson and Spours, 2006).

Within the Hodgson and Spours’ framework, the exploration of the education state, which was utilised in this study to examine the governance and the changing power structure in the education system, was conducted as the second research dimension. This part of the analysis allowed the identification of the impact of the governance arrangements and the strategic relationships between different policy actors in the process of the policy.

Finally, the key contested issues in the mixed-ability grouping policy, with regard to how have the first-line educators' perceptions of pupils' ability, teaching in different forms of classes, and the impacts of the senior high school entry system influenced the conflicts over the policy and the grouping practice decision-making process in schools, were explored.

The contribution of this study to knowledge is fourfold. First, this thesis extends the literature on the discussion of the changing process of the grouping practice in schools. It demonstrates that the conflicts over grouping practice in schools in Taiwan are profoundly influenced by the senior high school entry system and that the considerations of pupils' examination scores and parents' demands surpass the interest in exploring different forms of teaching and learning. The thorough exploration of the influence of the senior high school entry system and the wider contexts that support the system on grouping practice in schools has not been conducted before. Especially as selection within school is resurging under the 'marketised' education with an emphasis on academic excellence in many countries (Araújo, 2007; Reay, 1998), the Taiwanese example is a valuable addition to existing research regarding its specific historical and societal contexts that the changing process of the mixed-ability grouping policy have resided in. The analysis in this study shows that the clear academic/vocational divide, which is a part of a broader pattern of differentiation, and also the concept of differentiation by examination, have had a long-term impact on the debates of within-school grouping practices. This divide has been viewed by parents as influencing the future life of their children and by educators' as a valid differentiation between pupils.

Second, the thesis is a contribution to the sociology of Taiwanese education for it utilised an alternative lens to investigate the conflicts and the politics in the education system. Through exploring the relationships between the contexts and the actors, and

between the actors at different levels of the education system, it enhances the understanding of the policy-making process and the governance of policy in the Taiwanese education system. The thesis found that the Taiwanese education system has experienced the change of governing styles with the influences of the wider contexts, and it is now dominated by a governing style that utilises the power of the public, either by establishing multiple-participant committees or setting up complaint hotlines, to enforce a statutory educational policy. This finding reveals the key characteristic of the relationship between the current Taiwanese education system and the Taiwanese society, whereby the emphasis on rule by the public and rule by law, which can be seen as a reaction to the previous autocratic regime, dominate the governing of public policy.

Thirdly, this study provides an example of a ‘long-term’ policy ‘trajectory study’ (Ball, 2006; Ball, 1994; Lingard & Garrick, 1997), which not only traces the ‘gestation and construction of the policy’ (Lingard & Garrick, 1997), but also attends to the cyclical policy process that shapes and reshapes the policy texts and the practice of policy over time. Scholars have pointed out the importance and the necessity of tracing the evolution of an education policy from a long-term perspective in order to gain a thorough and contextualised understanding of the policy process (Ball, 2006; Cuban, 1990; McLaughlin, 2008). By focusing on both the changed and the unchanged contested issues within the policy process, and on the ideological, the structural, and the political characteristics embedded in the wider contexts of the education system (Grace, 1995), this study is an example for understanding the practice of policy from an evolutionary point of view.

Finally, this study gains insights into the Hodgson and Spours’ analytical framework, which incorporates the analysis of the wider contexts, the education state, the policy cycle and political space to examine the process and the conflicts over a long-term educational policy. Whilst the analysis shows that the connections and interactions among the wider

contexts, the power relationships between policy actors and the policy cycle are clearly dynamic, utilising the framework to investigate an educational policy that has experienced the transforming political eras, transforming education states and the continuous policy cycle enriches our understandings of these connections. The lesson learnt is that although the arguments with regards to the policy, the patterns of conflicts, and the manifestations of political space are influenced by the changing mainstream educational ideologies and the education states, the fundamental issues that concern the differentiation of people and the distribution of educational resources persist even though they were rephrased for the purpose of incorporating the mainstream educational ideologies.

9.1. The Policy process: a cyclical process with the influence of the wider contexts

By applying the analytical framework developed by Hodgson and Spours (2006), this study identifies the characteristics of the policy process over the 30-year period of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan, and gains an insightful understanding of the factors that influence the practice of the policy.

9.1.1. The cyclical and contested policy process

It is clear that the context of influence, the context of policy text, and the context of practice in the policy cycle of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan have interacted with one another. During the thirty-year period of the mixed-ability grouping policy, the central policy texts were revised six times with the modification of the pupil grouping methods and the procedure of implementation. Hundreds of local policy texts and policy recommendations were produced. Both before and after every policy revision, there were always conflicts with regard to the ideologies and the practices of the policy proposed

publicly in the media, conferences, or educational administrative meetings, or spread privately within schools and different interest groups. These conflicts have shaped the context of influence of the mixed-ability grouping policy and we can see that the ideological concerns have usually gained more attention and outweighed other practical concerns in the context of influence.

The context of policy texts is also a contested site. The findings show that although the central policy text has gradually prohibited streaming, it intended to strike a balance between mixed-ability grouping and attainment-based differentiation (by using setting), which is a strategy that my interviewees, who had complicated opinions towards the mixed-ability grouping policy, appreciated. The making of the local policy text is another contested procedure within which local demands and local situations are taken into consideration. In the two researched local educational authorities, they both utilised relevant procedural rules to allow schools to manipulate grouping arrangements, although they both emphasised the importance of following the central regulations.

In the context of practice, the findings show that there have been constant conflicts and negotiations among educational authorities, principals, teachers, parents, and interest groups. As demonstrated in chapter 5, whilst the MOE relied heavily on local inspection to enforce and to promote the policy, the two local educational authorities studied did not conduct inspections regularly, as mandated, due to their concerns over local resistance. In the case studies presented in chapter 7 and chapter 8, we can see that the competition between the equality perspective, the disciplinary perspective, the academic perspective, and the disciplinary-academic perspective held by the educators and the concern of educators over the interests of parents and the competition between schools together constructed the grouping practices of the two case-studied schools. The 'feasible' grouping arrangements developed by the two case-studied schools include the advanced weekend class, the gifted

class, and the talented class. The establishment of these classes also generated further conflicts among educational authorities, schools and interest groups.

It is worth noting that the manifestation of conflicts within the policy process may vary due to different governing styles and the different power relationships between policy actors. As will be demonstrated in the next section, the centralised bureaucratic governance tends to cloak, but not to confront disputes, whilst a more open education state brings the more diverse conflicts to the table.

9.1.2. The influence of political eras and the education state

The influences of the mainstream educational ideology and the power structure among policy actors in the education system on the evolution of the policy were clearly shown in the analysis presented in chapter 4. These influences not only provided a framework for asserting different and often contradictory arguments, they also altered patterns of interaction between the policy actors which shaped the manifestation of conflicts.

First of all, it was found that while the mainstream educational ideology seemed to directly favour certain kinds of arguments, arguments with different or even contrasting viewpoints utilised the same mainstream educational ideology to form their own points and to win support for their stances.

As demonstrated in chapter 4, the mixed-ability grouping policy was issued in an autocratic regime where a centralised education system controlled all aspects of educational affairs for the purpose of cultivating a nation-centred spirit and of producing economic manpower for the country. Under this overarching structure, a strong ‘education for the nation’ discourse was revealed in the discussion of the mixed-ability grouping policy. The main discourse adopted to promote the mixed-ability grouping policy was that the unequal education provided in streamed schools would lead to the deviance of lower attaining pupils

which would further incur social problems; and the main criticism of the policy was that mixed-ability grouping would prevent pupils from reaching their full potential which would severely hinder the development of the country. The policy texts during this autocratic regime also clearly stated that the regulations related to grouping practice were considered with the objective to facilitate the development of the country.

The findings also show that the mainstream educational ideology that has changed since the abolition of Martial Law had a significant influence on Taiwanese education and the interpretations of the mixed-ability grouping policy. The educational policies issued after 1987 strived to turn the 'education for the nation' ideology into an 'education for the citizen' ideology through the deregulation of the textbooks, the curriculum, and the teacher training system. The criticism about the existing educational practice has also increased. The mixed-ability grouping policy thus became a key policy supported by the newly-established civil educational reform groups and the NTA with the rationales that using mixed-ability grouping could help normalise teaching in junior high schools and that it could provide equal opportunities for every child. The discourse of 'normalising junior high level education' has been added to the central policy text of the policy ever since. Further, the resisters of the policy also adopted a similar discourse to support their objection to the mixed-ability grouping policy and the concept of 'providing equal opportunities to learn' was interpreted as providing differentiated education.

In terms of the difference of the power structure in the education system in the two political eras and its influences on the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy, the findings show that the negligence of the complexity of the policy implementation in the centralised education system contributed to the education system's inability to deal with resistance and conflicts. The system which had an top-down assumption towards the policy implementation underestimated the importance of assessing and reviewing the policy

implementation and the fact that almost every school still used streaming, but reported that they followed the policy, revealed the system's inability to manage an educational policy.

The change of the power structure among educational policy actors after 1987 is found to have had a significant influence on the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy. It was found that with the transformation of the education state and the open up of political space, different policy actors were officially endowed with stronger powers over educational affairs, the process of the policy became more open, and the conflicts within the policy has become discussable. The civil educational reform groups that have intentionally utilised and created political spaces in the policy process, was pivotal in disclosing the 'illegal' practice of the policy and arousing public attention; and the decentralisation of the educational system, which endowed local educational authorities with stronger authority to supervise the mixed-ability grouping policy unmasked previously hidden local concerns. These two changes together contributed to a more diverse and open discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of the policy; and these discussions have offered a more delicate understanding about the barriers faced within the policy implementation process.

9.2. The governance of the mixed-ability grouping policy

Evidence shows that the governance of the mixed-ability grouping policy at both the central and the local educational authority levels has two characteristics—a top-down style of governance that utilises orders and sanctions to facilitate implementation, and also an approach that seeks the participation of a wider array of policy actors, including parents, civil groups, professional organisations and scholars to facilitate the policy implementation. The combination of these two characteristics also reflects the adaptation of the existing educational authority to the changing power structure within the education system.

As demonstrated in chapter 5, the top-down style of governance described in the policy

texts and the official implementation plan utilises mandate, inspection, and sanction and reward for the purpose of creating national conformity and uniformity. Enforcing the mixed-ability grouping policy through law further reinforces this expectation. Evidence also shows that both the MOE and the researched local educational authorities put the majority of their efforts into dealing with suspected violations and imposing warnings and sanctions in the context of policy practice.

On the other hand, the analysis also shows that the central and the local educational authorities utilised the power of the public, rather than internal assessment to oversee the practice of schools. This style of governance started to appear with the rise of civil advocacy groups after 1987, and was introduced into the official policy texts as a lawful mechanism in 2004. It can be seen that in the mixed-ability grouping legislation, the local educational authority is mandated to provide a complaints hotline to allow the public to lodge complaints, and to establish a local 'Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy Promotion Committee' to supervise the implementation of the policy. Although in the two researched local educational authorities this Committee only had a basic function, the complaints hotline played an important role in their governance as local educational authorities inspected, sanctioned, and also provided extra help to schools based on the complaints received. This pattern of utilising power of the public to impose top-down control has become the governing style of the Taiwanese education system; and the same governance pattern could also be found in the practice of the zero-corporal punishment policy and the anti-'hairstyle ban' policy, which were all highly controversial policies that were originally promoted outside the traditional education system.

The education reform process in Taiwan has made a significant contribution to this governance pattern. Within the process, reformers, on the one hand, demanded that the education system should officially allow the public to participate in educational affairs, but,

on the other hand, they advocated enforcing several educational policies through law in the hope of endowing reform policies with greater momentum. A sense of ‘utilising the collective power and legalisation to enforce uniformity’ can be detected, and some of the school principals surveyed in this study found the educational legislation to be practically useful because it allowed them to reject the requests for streaming in schools.

In addition, it is found that although ‘capacity building’—namely the support with regard to teaching and managing mixed-ability classrooms provided to school educators to implement the policy—was mentioned periodically in the policy texts, there was no official strategy being planned or adopted to evaluate and to improve the teaching and the management of mixed-ability classrooms. Considering the assumption about policy implementation held by the educational authorities, which expects successful implementation through orders and sanctions, it can be inferred that the MOE’s ‘imagination of change’ regarding the mixed-ability grouping policy has been limited to the change of grouping practice, but not necessarily to the teaching and learning in mixed-ability classrooms.

In terms of the relationship between the MOE, the local educational authority, and the schools, the interplay between the ‘invention’ of new methods to group higher attaining pupils and the issue of new policies to ensure the adoption of mixed-ability grouping was detected. Although the legal status endows the mixed-ability grouping policy and the MOE with more authority to oversee the practice of the policy, analysis shows that local politics and the practical concern with regard to pupils’ attainments have a substantial influence on the practice of the local educational authorities and the schools.

As can be seen in chapter 5, chapter 7 and chapter 8, the balance achieved by the local educational authority and the schools was, on the one hand, to conform to the policy, but on the other hand, to be passive towards promoting the policy and to create new methods to

group higher attaining pupils. Further, a tacit agreement with regard to the space for schools to group higher attaining pupils was found between the local educational authority and the schools. The finding that both the local educational authorities studied and the case-studied schools recognised that establishing talented and gifted classes and maintaining advanced weekend classes were acceptable strategies for grouping higher attaining pupils without going against the mixed-ability grouping legislation is one clear example.

This study found that the MOE launched several revisions of relevant regulations to respond to these challenges. For example, it revised the regulations regarding the conditions of establishing gifted and talented classes for the purpose of eliminating these ‘disguised forms’ of higher attaining pupil grouping. The MOE’s actions reflect its dependence on using legislation and sanctions to promote the policy implementation. The concern about increasing first-line educators’ capacity to teach in mixed-ability groups has been missing in the MOE’s actions.

It should be noted that to enforce the mixed-ability grouping policy and other regulations through law has complicated implications in local practice. For some local educational authorities and schools, the new legislation helped to settle conflicts, for example the legislation allowed them to reject the demands for streaming. However, for others, the legislation was viewed as a hindrance which prevented the local educational authorities and the schools from developing their own grouping practice. Although all of the local officers and educators interviewed argued the importance of following the law, it could be detected that there was an uncertainty about the policy which was generated from the complicated considerations and the politics involved in the process of decision-making.

9.3. School practice: parents’ demands and the market-like mechanism, the competing perspectives, and the embedded

perceptions of teaching and learning

A complicated interplay among parents' demands, educators' perceptions of pupils' ability, educators' perceptions of teaching and learning and the ambiguous general attitudes held by educators towards the mixed-ability grouping policy was found to influence the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy in schools. It was also found that the senior high school entry system explicitly and implicitly influenced all the above-mentioned issues. Further, a tendency for school educators to focus on arguing about the influence of the senior high school entry system and parents' demands on the grouping practice of the schools was detected. This tendency was found to cloak the ideological and practical debates between school educators and it also edged out the possibility for educators to approach this 'implementation dilemma' through a professional discussion.

9.3.1. Parents' demands and the 'market-like mechanism'

Parents' demands were cited to be the most critical factor that interfered with schools' decisions about grouping practice. The educators' accounts show that schools position themselves in a between-school competition, where parents are important customers, the high senior high school entry rate is the stake, and the increasing pupil intake is the gain. This 'market-like mechanism' in Taiwan, which functions without an official introduction of market force into the education system, is operated through parents' manipulation of catchment areas and the competition between schools (L-Y. Lu, 2009). It is perceived and argued by educators that whilst parents use the senior high school entry rate to decide which junior high schools to send their children to, junior high schools utilise special grouping practices and other grade-boosting strategies to recruit higher attaining pupils and to produce satisfactory attainments.

The academic/vocational divide established in the education system has contributed to

the competition for entering academic high schools. It can be seen that both in parents' perceptions and the findings of existing studies that entering different kinds of schools does lead to a disparity in the educational resource received and the future life opportunity of pupils (Lyau, 2003; Lyau & M-S, Liu, 2004; T-S, Lin, 2002). Further, in this market place, we can see that both parents and the schools are in an even more extreme 'highest-ranking academic high school entry rate' competition. Other than the competition for entering an academic high school, in a ranking system within which schools are individually ranked by the average scores their students obtained in the senior high school entry examination, the differentiation created by the 'ranking' contributes to another kind of competition. Within this competition, competitors believe that entering the highest-ranking high schools ensures the better opportunity to enter the highest-ranking university, hence a better life opportunity. In this case, junior high level education is viewed by parents as a 'positional good' and that it is the comparison rather than the quality of education that decides the value of schools (Hollis, 1982).

Moreover, it was found that not only were schools evaluated by parents, pupils were also evaluated by schools in the market place. The schools' desire to recruit higher attaining pupils implicitly discriminated against pupils with lower attainments. Moreover, within the market-like mechanism, 'a uniformity of action' was detected. The two schools studied both expressed the importance of 'learning the grade-boosting strategies from other schools'. The advanced weekend classes, the gifted classes, and the talented classes were all established under such concern. This mode of competition further hampers the reflection upon these special grouping practices. It was found that there was little doubt about the necessity to prepare those who already perform well to perform better; and the discussion about putting more effort into teaching lower attaining pupils attracts much less attention.

9.3.2. Educators' attitudes and educators' perceptions of pupils' ability and teaching

Resembling the findings of previous research studies (Ball, 1981; Ireson & Hallam, 2001), educators in Taiwan viewed mixed-ability grouping from different perspectives that respectively concern its disciplinary effects, its academic effects, and its influence on equality in schools. It was agreed that using mixed-ability grouping would facilitate school discipline, equalise the resource distribution, and mitigate the negative labelling of lower attaining pupils. On the other hand, it was argued that mixed-ability grouping is problematic for teaching, lowers pupils' academic performance, and lowers the schools' senior high school entry rate.

The findings in the two case-studied schools show that under the market-like mechanism which values pupils' grades, the academic perspective was most concerned by educators in their decision of grouping practice. Even for the school (North Creek Junior High) where teachers had more positive attitudes towards the policy and decided to use mixed-ability grouping without setting in normal school hours (the school still had two weekend extra classes and a gifted class), the maintenance of high pupil attainments was the main reason they kept using mixed-ability grouping. The educators at North Creek also argued that if pupils' attainments decreased, strategies such as setting or other kinds of higher attaining pupil grouping may need to be applied.

In addition, although this study did not intend to explore the effects of different grouping practices on pupils' attainment, the findings at North Creek showed that positive academic effects of mixed-ability grouping may be mediated by the enhanced discipline. The educators interviewed at North Creek developed a 'disciplinary-academic' perspective, which emphasised the relationship between the discipline in school and pupils' attainments.

This is a perspective that has not been considered in previous research studies on the effects of mixed-ability grouping on attainment and it is worth further exploration. Further, the development of the ‘disciplinary-academic’ perspective also suggests that in the process of an educational policy the practices and the policy actors’ attitudes interact with each other in a dynamic manner. In this case, educators developed a new perspective to incorporate their new experience into old concerns for the purpose of supporting their current grouping practices in schools.

One thing worth noting is that while the majority of previous research studies found that the educators’ preferences for grouping practice may vary due to the subjects they teach (Ball, 1981; Ireson & Hallam, 2001; Reid et al., 1981), a similar finding was not discovered in this study. The common belief that using streaming or setting would facilitate teaching and pupils’ attainments was found to be held by the majority of the educators interviewed irrespective of the subjects they taught.

When attempting to understand the ways in which educators perceive pupils’ abilities, I found that the perceptions of the school educators interviewed were influenced by the dichotomous provision of senior high level education and the senior high school entry examination. A clear divide between ‘academic aptitude’ and ‘vocational aptitude’, which not only implies the division between the ‘higher’ and the ‘lower’ ability, but also resembles the dichotomy of the provision of senior high level education was adopted by educators to judge pupils’ ability. This account was also found to be often used by the educators to argue that not all pupils have the ability and the aptitude to be placed in advanced weekend classes or higher attaining classes.

Moreover, it was found that the main criterion the educators interviewed used to divide pupils into having different aptitudes was pupils’ academic performance rather than other measurements of ‘ability’. Although the educators in one of the case-studied school—North

Creek Junior High—went further to discuss the impact of external influences, such as the family background of pupils, on pupils' academic performance in junior high schools, it was found that the educators still quickly classified the pupils into the 'smarter' or 'not so smart' categories based on pupils' academic attainments just as the educators in the other case-studied school. This immediate connection between pupils' attainments and pupils' abilities reveals the fact that the educators' perceptions of pupils' ability have been conditioned by this narrowly-focused indicator of academic performance. Another observation was that while educators talked about 'vocational ability', most of them couldn't describe it with concrete examples. This vague understanding of vocational abilities may be related to educators' lack of understanding of the vocational education provided in vocational high schools. Whilst most educators went to high ranking academic high schools and there was no professional training regarding helping pupils reach their potential in different areas, it would be difficult for them to get rid of the discourse of academic/vocational divide and the stereotype that lower academic performance equals vocational ability.

The ways in which educators perceived teaching in mixed-ability groups was also found to be shaped by the wider educational contexts, including the senior high school entry examination and the centralised curriculum. The necessity of covering and reviewing all textbook materials and getting pupils ready for the examination were the main issues discussed by educators when they were asked about their teaching. Moreover, the teaching practice of the educators interviewed was constrained by the senior high school entry examination. The educators argued that in order to prepare pupils for the examination, dictating textbooks was the most common teaching method adopted.

Although teachers' general response regarding teaching in mixed-ability groups resembled the general findings of the previous studies that they felt using mixed-ability

grouping made it difficult to attend to the needs of both the higher and lower attaining pupils (Ball, 1981; C. Chou, 2005; Ireson & Hallam, 2001; S-F. Liu, 2004; Reid et al., 1981), it should be noted that the majority of the educators in this study formed this argument on the basis of using the same teaching methods in the streamed classes and the mixed-ability classrooms. It is under this premise and the pursuit of pupils' attainments, that mixed-ability grouping teaching was viewed as difficult, and that educators had weak motives to develop innovative teaching in mixed-ability classrooms.

In addition, although this study did not explore in depth the influence of the teaching training provided to teachers on their attitudes towards and their practice of the policy, a survey conducted by the HEF in 2003, which investigated teachers who taught the course 'Teaching Materials and Teaching Methods' in college level teacher training institutions, showed that only very few of them had discussed teaching in different kinds of groups (HEF, 2003b). In the interviews with teachers in this study, I also found that there had been no systematic learning or discussion about teaching in mixed-ability groups in teachers' either pre-service or in-service training. Therefore, it would not be a surprise that most educators only gave little thought to this issue, and it would be difficult for them to react to influence of the senior high school entry examination with alternative actions.

However, it is worth noting that the experience of teaching in mixed-ability classrooms and the recent reform of the senior high school entry system seemed to influence the perceptions of teaching in mixed-ability groups of some educators interviewed. At North Creek Junior High, where educators decided to use mixed-ability grouping without using setting in any subject in normal school hours, some of the teachers interviewed mentioned how they managed to take care of both the higher and lower attaining pupils in classrooms and indicated that teaching in mixed-ability classrooms was not as difficult as they had imagined. The reform of the contents of the senior high school entry examination was also

recognised by the educators at North Creek and some of them argued that the 'ability-based' examination contents would facilitate the use of mixed-ability grouping.

To summarise, the investigation of teachers' perceptions of pupils' ability and their perceptions of teaching reveals a specific phenomenon in Taiwan that the concern about creating higher academic performance edges out professional discussion at the present moment. The analysis showed that while the demand for higher attainments was valued primarily, the schools chose to use the most 'efficient' and accustomed ways to boost pupils' attainments, which made it difficult for educators to give thought to other aspects regarding teaching and learning. Whilst it is reasonable to comment on the negative influence that the senior high school entry system imposes on schools, other reflections, such as how the examination and how the dichotomous academic/vocational division between pupils may implicitly shape the accustomed teaching practice and the stereotypical perceptions of pupils' abilities, were rarely discussed by the educators interviewed. It is under these circumstances, that the discussions about how first-line educators could improve teaching in mixed-ability classrooms were found missing in the schools.

Further, although almost all educators interviewed argued that the removal of the senior high school entry examination would facilitate the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy, many hidden and unresolved disputes about teaching, learning, and the perception of people's ability in using mixed-ability grouping were detected. It is thus reasonable to suggest that, although the change of the senior high school entry system may help reconstruct the practical objectives of junior high schools' schooling, to create an ideal educational environment also requires the reconstruction of the perceptions of teaching, learning and pupils' ability. This kind of reconstruction usually comes from in-depth reflections on the accustomed concepts and from the effort to discover new insights.

9.3.3. The influence of the senior high school entry system

Educators' conceptualisation of the influence of the current senior high school entry system revealed their interpretations of the structure-agency relationship between the senior high school entry system and educators, within which the educators and the schools were usually positioned in a passive role.

In the discussion about the influence of the senior high school entry system on the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy, the educators' responses synthesised different perspectives identified by previous scholars. On the one hand, educators argued that parents' 'fanaticism' about their child getting a place at a higher ranking advanced school, rather than the senior high school entry system itself, put pressure on schools. This contention resembles the 'Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi (升學主義) perspective that highlights the 'irrational pursuit' of higher test scores regardless of personal aptitudes and the price that needs to be paid for the pursuit (Y-W. Chang, & W-Y. Lin, 2002). In this account, the senior high school entry system is viewed as a neutral mechanism, and the belief of agent autonomy is unfolded through the blame the educators put on parents.

On the other hand, the educators interviewed also recognised that the senior high school entry system framed the actions and the attitudes of parents and the schools. In this 'structural determination' account, the main argument is that all the 'anti-educational' behaviours of schools, including focusing on teaching the subjects which are examined, cramming pupils with large amounts of tests, and streaming pupils to push the academically able ones, are determined by the senior high school entry system. This argument accentuates the determinative influence of the external conditions, which is contradictory to the above argument that emphasising the actions of parents. Nonetheless, these two accounts were used together commonly to explain why schools adopted grouping practices that were not

allowed by legislation or even contradicted educator's own educational judgment. Put another way, this kind of argument tactfully secures the professional status of school educators because it blames both the parents and the senior high school entry examination for the 'anti-educational' grouping practices, but contends that schools have the ability to practice ideally as long as the senior high school entry system is improved or removed.

Nonetheless, whether the 'improving the senior high school entry system solves it all' account is tenable is worth further exploration. What this study found is that the values that are delivered by the system, which include the emphasis on examination scores and the dichotomy between 'academic ability' and 'vocational ability', have already embedded in educators' perceptions. Therefore, it is doubtful whether these embedded values and the corresponding teaching practices would easily disappear after the abolition of the entry examination. As demonstrated above, the tendency to displace resistance onto parents and the senior high school entry system concealed the unsettled disputes and hindered professional discussion about matters such as teaching and learning in mixed-ability groups. There were rare reflections discussed by either practitioners or researchers on the relationship between the senior high school entry system and the educators' attitudes and actions in the controversy of the mixed-ability grouping policy, and there were rare discussions about whether any professional behaviour may help the schools to react to the senior high school entry examination more positively.

Further, educators' conceptualisation of the influence of the senior high school entry system also revealed their implicit attitudes towards the selection ideology in society. It was found that although educators complained about the negative influence of the senior high school entry system on junior high school schooling, they did not necessarily object to the idea of differentiating pupils in the transition between junior high level education and senior high level education through a 'fair' measurement. This concern was also revealed in the

reform of the senior high school entry system as that while the reform intended to turn the difficult examination into a basic ability test, doubts about the ‘capability’ of the test to distinguish pupils were expressed by many educators.

As can be seen, the debate about whether the senior high school entry system should be a selective system or a system to help pupils to obtain desired education is still going on in Taiwan, and the idea that education and the senior high school entry system should be able to ‘distinguish’ people has still influenced the junior high school education, including the grouping practices. This study argues that it is important to keep exploring educators’ perceptions of the influence of the senior high school entry examination and its difference from the influences suggested by existing research studies. It is because school educators are the first-line practitioners in the education system whose critical reflections on what happens in school would be crucial in facilitating reform or improvement. The analysis in this study shows that currently there is a gap between educators’ understanding of the influence of the senior high school entry examination and the impacts detected by research studies. Educators’ perceptions of parents’ demands may be limited, and the influence of the examination on educators’ perceptions of teaching and learning may be underestimated. This study thus suggests that it would be crucial for the teacher training system and for educational authorities to provide the opportunity for teachers to re-examine their perceptions of teaching and learning, pupils’ abilities and also the intentions of parents. It is hoped that with these critical reflections, more diverse and maybe more creative thoughts can be developed, and educators can feel more active and energetic when facing a strong structural influence (e.g. the senior high school entry system).

9.4. Notes about educational change and policy implication

There are a number of points regarding the momentum of educational change observed

in this study.

First of all, it is found that the rationales and the objectives of an educational policy can be interpreted from different perspectives based on different mainstream educational ideologies that may either confine or enhance the in-depth examination and also the practice of the policy. As discussed in earlier sections, whilst the mixed-ability grouping policy was issued in the Martial Law period, the nation-centred ideology, which emphasised the soundness of society, was the main objective of the policy. Under the circumstance, the meanings and the effects of the policy were discussed within a limited scope, and the policy itself presented contradictory messages that both mixed-ability grouping and streaming were promoted at the same time. As Mosen-Lowe et al. (2009) pointed out, the ideology of particular educational policies may be 'reframed by the more dominant, near hegemonic discourse'(p. 473). The Taiwanese example shows that this kind of 'reframing' may hinder the in-depth understanding and discussion of an educational policy, which may further complicates the policy practice.

Secondly, educational change would be facilitated with persistent discussions about the ideologies and the practical concerns among policy actors in different positions, and it is evident in this study that the patterns of discussion and negotiation are inseparable from the characteristics and the development of society. In Taiwan, the transition from autocratic regime to democratic governance gave rise to the active participation of civil reform groups in educational affairs. The efforts made by the civil reform groups have contributed to the persistent discussions that used to be downplayed within the hierarchical education system. In the long process of the mixed-ability grouping policy, these groups provided evidence of grouping practices that obviously discriminated against certain pupils, detailed rationales of the policy, and even Q&A brochures to generate public debates. All of these actions made society aware of the issues in the mixed-ability grouping policy and forced the education

authorities, the school educators and society more generally to discuss and to take actions.

In addition, the reconstruction of the education state from the previously strict centralised system and the establishment of the multiple-participant committees in different levels of the education system also contribute to more open discussions of the policy. Hodgson and Spours (2006) pointed out that the devolved education state would contribute to the open and interactive style of policy-making. We can see that even for a top-down policy like the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan, a more devolved system still facilitates the discussion about the policy, which helps to unmask the hidden conflicts and provides the political space to discuss both the ideological and practical concerns.

An interesting outcome of the persistent discussion about the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan was to enforce the policy through law, which was realised with the efforts of advocacy groups, teachers' groups and also parents' groups. From one perspective, to enforce educational policies through law manifests a strong top-down sense that limits local and school autonomy; but as mentioned earlier, in the case of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan this decision was supported by various policy actors because it was viewed as helping to alleviate the pressure that the local educational authorities and the schools faced. In other words, enforcing the mixed-ability grouping policy through law can be seen as a collective decision which came into existence as a result of the persistent discussions of different policy actors.

However, here I would like to point out that devolution itself does not necessarily contribute to a more favourable environment for collaborative policy practice. It largely depends on the degree of devolution, the exact power distribution, and the coordination system. In Taiwan's case, whilst the local educational authority is in charge of the administrative and financial aspects of compulsory education (grades 1-9), the policies with regard to compulsory education are mostly of national status and are designed and directly

governed by the MOE. This situation sometimes provokes heated conflicts between the central and the local levels of governance, especially when the national policy contradicts local interests. The 'devolution' in Taiwan can thus be categorised into what Karlson (2000) suggested as 'delegation', which means that the power shifted from central to local is limited. Whilst scholars called for a detailed regulation regarding the power distribution between the central and the local educational authorities (Y-N. Hsu, 2008), the establishment of a coordination system that attends not only to the power relationships between different authorities but also to the contradictions with regard to particular educational policies should also be considered.

Thirdly, whilst educational policy can be issued, discussed and argued based on abstract ideologies, the implementation of an educational policy requires reflections on the objectives of the policy, feasible practices and, most importantly the existing perceptions that are related to the policy. Reflection on teaching and learning in mixed-ability groups, rather than simply focusing on the methods of grouping could be one example. As suggested by Ball (1981, p. 287):

The abandonment of streaming does not necessarily change either those aspects of the socially-defined limits of 'good practice' or the ideologies of teaching within school, which relate to the organisation of classroom knowledge, to teaching methods and to conceptions of ability which are fundamental to the process of differentiation.

Similar findings were discovered in Taiwan that the adoption of mixed-ability grouping does not automatically lead to the reconsideration of teaching methods, the objectives of junior high school teaching, and the attainment-based differentiation between pupils. As demonstrated earlier, the influence of the senior high school entry system plays a crucial part in narrowing the imagination towards teaching and pupils' ability; and the lack of forethought that teaching and learning should be discussed in the process of the

mixed-ability grouping policy also underestimates the difficulty of initiating a fundamental change. Further, it was found that the consideration about the ‘politics’ generated by parents and some other powerful actors, such as local councillors, in the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy edged out professional discussions. This lack of professional discussion about teaching and learning in mixed-ability groups reinforces the stereotypical advantages and disadvantages of different grouping practices, and to a certain degree, it also reinforces the concern about the ‘politics’- the pressure that is inflicted by powerful actors.

However, whilst the demand for attainment-based differentiation is usually proposed based on the stereotypical understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of the mixed-ability grouping policy, there is a possibility that the innovation of teaching and learning and the reconsideration of the stereotypical arguments may create more opportunities for educators to face the alleged pressure. My findings about North Creek Junior High show that the shifts in discourse from mainly emphasising pupils’ attainment to valuing both pupils’ academic and disciplinary performance to some degree facilitate parents’ understanding of the schools’ decision to use mixed-ability grouping. As educational professionals, to develop alternative discourses with regard to teaching and learning may be crucial in facilitating change within the competition between various interests.

9.5. The limitation of the research and future directions

Whilst this research was originally interested primarily in the school level implementation and then broadened its focus in order to understand the current practice through tracing the evolution of the mixed-ability grouping policy, the limited research resources (time and labour) confined the research scope of this study. It can be seen that I put more efforts into exploring the current practice by utilising interviews, case studies and

documentary analysis but used mainly documentary analysis to explore the earlier process of the mixed-ability grouping policy. Although I tried to keep the depth and breadth by utilising various strategies to depict the long policy process, many subsequent studies can be conducted to enrich the findings of this study. For example, the exploration of the inception and the revisions of the policy and the investigation of the patterns of conflicts between different policy actors could incorporate the interviews with the previous key policy actors in order to learn more about the earlier policy process.

Further, although this study was not specifically designed to compare the practice in two schools, the similarities and the differences observed in the two case-studies schools could provide an analytical framework to approach individual schools or to conduct a comparative study. My findings about how the educators in the two schools utilised very similar perspectives but constructed them in different ways based on the local contexts, the process of negotiation and the educators' backgrounds reveal the complexity within the seeming uniformity.

Moreover, it is suggested that a longitudinal study that aims to explore the long-term experience of individual schools, which may help capture the factors that influence the sustainability of change is worth conducting. My findings at North Creek Junior High that the school educators developed positive attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy with the premise that using mixed-ability grouping would not decrease pupils' attainments, raise questions regarding the sustainability of change. It is difficult to ascertain whether the few years of the implementation will be overturned with the lowering of pupils' attainments or whether it will be sustained with alternative concerns. A study that aims to understand the sustainability of a change, and also the factors that contribute to the sustainability can be developed from this study.

Another limitation of this study is that it did not examine in detail the differences of

policy actors in the same 'categories'. For example, the differences between different teachers' associations or between different parents' associations that may result from the different contexts and socio-economic background that these groups are within were not explored further.

Wells & Serna (1997) suggested that the pursuit of streaming within schools manifests the preservation of the privileges of the elite, middle-class status in American contexts. However, my interviewees' responses revealed a more complicated picture regarding the relationship between policy actors' socio-economic status and their attitudes towards the attainment-based differentiation. For example, educators felt that parents with a higher socio-economic background paid more attention to school education. However, whilst some of these parents demanded attainment-based differentiation, some of them viewed mixed-ability grouping as liberal and progressive. This phenomenon is related to the characteristics of the education reform in Taiwan. Whilst the education reform was supported by middle- or upper-class families who wanted to change the rigid, crammed, and test-oriented education and to promote a more liberal schooling environment that represents a progression and independence that they identified with, the reform was also criticised by some as being a middle- and upper-class luxury (H-C. Hsien, 2003; W-N, Wu, 2000). In the case of the mixed-ability grouping policy, some resisters argued that pupils who come from a higher socio-economic status family have the highest chance to benefit from mixed-ability grouping and that the pupils who have the 'ability' but no strong family background may be 'sacrificed' because their chance of being placed in a higher attaining class and entering the highest-ranking senior high school would be sabotaged. In other words, as social position plays a crucial role in the competition of educational benefits, the definition of the benefits and the corresponding school practices could be interpreted differently within different contexts. This dynamic relationship between educational practice and policy actors with

different social characteristics is worth further exploration.

In terms of one of the contested key issues in this research—the influence of the senior high school entry system on educators’ perceptions of teaching and learning, there is the potential to extend the research in the Taiwanese context and to synthesise the findings with similar research conducted in other countries. The effects of high-stakes testing have been discussed extensively in the UK and the US after the implementation of the policies that use testing as a means to hold the schools responsible for pupils’ performance. Existing literature highlights that pupils would be divided into categories and alienated from learning in a test-focused environment (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Walsh, 2006). Being a country where high-stakes testing has been applied, believed in, and also criticised for a long period of time, the Taiwanese example can serve as a case to further explore the dialectic relationship between accountability, outcome, and teaching and learning.

Finally, I find that the Hodgson and Spours’ analytical framework has the potential to delineate the educational policy process on a long-term basis, which is a research approach that has been argued by scholars as crucial in future policy research (Ball, 2006; Cuban, 1990; McLaughlin, 2008). The emphasis of the wider contexts of educational policies and the power relationships between policy actors enriches the understandings of the key factors that influence the policy process over time.

In terms of whether the analytical framework may be used to ‘predict policy outcome’, which was proposed but not discussed by Hodgson and Spours in their paper (Hodgson & Spours, 2006; p 692), the findings in this study suggest that the knowledge about the complicated relationships between political eras, the education states, political space and the policy cycle still needs to be extended. In the case of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan, I find that although the policy could be framed to fit in with certain mainstream educational ideologies, the main messages of the policy may still be ignored if they only

partially fit in with or even contradict the complicated mainstream educational ideologies. This condition may subsequently undermine the possibility for the policy to be constructively discussed and to be successfully implemented. In other words, it would be necessary to examine the complexity of both the mainstream educational ideologies and an educational policy so that the connection between them can be solidly established, and the possible change intended by the policy can be better foreseen.

It is similar when considering the influence of the characteristics of the education states on the process of change. As discussed above, the characteristics of a devolved education state are complicated and the devolved education state may also created new challenges in governing an educational policy. Nonetheless, in Taiwan's case, the more devolved education state did help to create a better balance between policy actors which not only facilitated the discussion of conflicts, but also built a foundation for diverse participants to develop alternative ideas to achieve the consensual objectives and to develop feasible practices in the changing process.

To conclude, the exploration of the mixed-ability grouping policy in this study reveals that the contested issues in an educational policy may not have the chance to be discussed in-depth by policy actors due to the following reasons—the top-down assumption about policy that overlooks the politics in the policy process, over-concern about the politics, which leads to a lack of discussion about the teaching and learning in mixed-ability grouping policy, and the explicit and implicit influences imposed by the external conditions. It is under these circumstances that the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan has been problematic and conflicted. This study thus suggests that it is imperative for educational policy actors, especially the authorities, to recognise that changes usually occur within conflicts, negotiation and compromise within the influences of the wider contexts; and it is important for policy actors to develop a more constructive manner to face

the messy policy process. The objective of doing so is to develop new attitudes, new methods and new actions within the policy process in the hope of achieving the common ground of competing interests. In the case of the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan, it is thus imperative for the authorities and the educators to critically reflect on the ideologies of attainment-based differentiation and the teaching and learning in schools. Two specific suggestions are that educational authorities in Taiwan should start now systematically to examine the teaching in junior high schools, the relationships between teachers and parents, and also the alternative methods for teachers to teach and to discuss with parents. After the study of the current situation and the possible practice, educational authorities should further incorporate discussion about mixed-ability grouping teaching and positive parent-school relationship into both pre-service and in-serve teacher training for the purpose of helping educators to face the alleged conflict between equity and quality.

Appendix 1: Taiwanese School System

The school system in Taiwan is similar to that in other developed countries worldwide.

Schools have been established at different levels from pre-school to higher education (See figure below). The key facts are listed as follows:

1. Compulsory education in Taiwan starts at primary level and ends in senior high level. It constitutes grades 1 to 9. The first six years are primary level education, and the last three are junior high level education.
2. The enrolment at a particular primary and junior high school is based on pupils' the household registry.
3. The average number of pupils in one class in junior high schools was around 33⁴² in 2009.
4. The average pupil-teacher ratio in junior high schools was around 15:1 in 2009⁴³.
5. The number of pupils in a class varies from county to county and from school to school.
6. The class size can be as big as 50 or as small as 10.
7. Around 92.3% of junior high school graduate go to senior high schools in 2009⁴⁴.
8. The senior high school level education in Taiwan now includes academic senior high schools, integrated senior high schools which provide both academic and vocational tracks, vocational senior high schools, and a number of 5-year vocational junior colleges.
9. The space available in senior high schools for junior high school graduates to enrol has exceeded the number of junior high school graduates since 1986. However, the disparity between different kinds of schools (academic and vocational), between the star schools and the general schools⁴⁵, and between the public and private schools are widely recognised by parents, educators and pupils.
10. After senior high school education, pupils can go to a two-year vocational college, a four-year vocational college, a four-year university or a medical school by application, recommendation, or centralised distribution. The scores pupils gain in the two college entry examinations form the basis of which channel they use to gain a college place.

⁴² See the statistics on the Ministry of Education's website:

http://www.edu.tw/files/site_content/B0013/overview42.xls

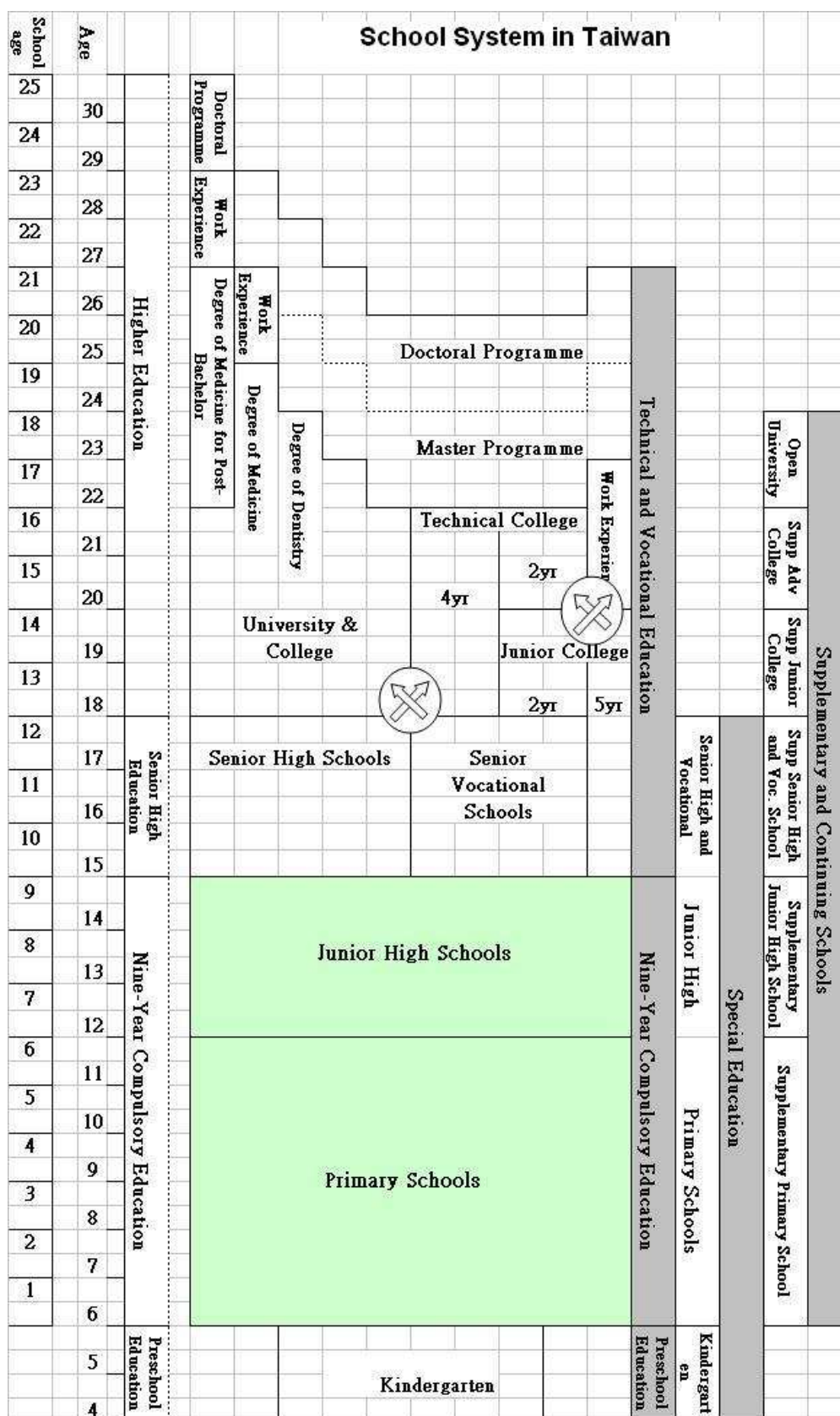
⁴³ See the statistics on the Ministry of Education's website:

http://www.edu.tw/files/site_content/B0013/overview42.xls

⁴⁴ See: http://www.edu.tw/files/site_content/B0013/98_all_level.doc

⁴⁵ In general, Taiwanese people view the schools that only recruit the pupils with highest scores in the senior high school entry examination as the 'star school'.

Figure 4 :Taiwanese School System



Appendix 2: The Versions of the Mixed-ability Policy

<p>1979: Pilot regulation (The Execution Codes of Grouping Practice for Junior High School Pupils)</p> <p>The first grade of junior high level education should adopt mixed-ability grouping. Setting or banding can be utilised in the second and the third grade.</p> <p>In order to improve the vocational education, the third grade of junior high level education could use streaming.</p> <p>Setting should be formed within every two or three classes based on pupils' IQ scores, aptitudes, and attainments.</p> <p>Banding of pupils should be based on pupils' attainments or IQ scores. Pupils within the same band should be mixed-ability grouped.</p> <p>Ladder-like streaming is strictly prohibited.</p> <p>The teaching methods used and the teaching material adopted should be enhanced when using setting or banding.</p>
<p>1982: Administrative order (The Execution Codes of Grouping Practice for Junior High School Pupils)</p> <p>Revised the code: <i>'In order to improve the vocational education, the third grade of junior high level education could use streaming' into 'In order to improve the vocational education, junior high schools can establish a vocational class in the third grade, but the establishment of a fixed 'vocational class' and a 'advanced school entry class' is not allowed'</i></p> <p>Add one code: The execution of mixed-ability grouping can utilise pupils' IQ scores, physical heights, and an open lottery but not the order the pupils report to school or the distance pupils live from the school to decide pupils' placement. An example of the execution is as follows: if the school is going to group the 280 new pupils for the first grade this year into 6 classes, pupils should be ranked from 1 to 280 first based on their IQ scores first, and then allocated by their ranks as shown as below:</p> <p>Class one: 1, 12, 13, 24....</p> <p>Class two: 2, 11, 14, 23....</p> <p>Class three: 3, 10, 15, 22...</p> <p>Class four: 4, 9, 16, 21...</p> <p>Class Five: 5, 8, 17, 20...</p> <p>Class Six: 6, 7, 18, 19...</p>
<p>1983: Administrative order (The Execution Codes of Grouping Practice for Junior High School Pupils)</p>

Reconfirm the above codes.
1985:Administrative order (The Execution Codes of Grouping Practice for Junior High School Pupils)
<p>Revised the code: <i>‘The first grade of junior high level education should adopt mixed-ability grouping. Setting or banding can be utilised in the second and the third grades’ into ‘<u>All grades in junior high level education should utilise mixed-ability grouping. Setting in subjects can be utilised from the second grade, and the voluntary selected grouping can be adopted in the third grade</u>’.</i></p> <p>Add one code: Junior high schools could adjust pupils’ placements in ability groups based on pupils’ progress and adjustments to the groups could be made in the middle or at the end of every semester.</p>
1991: Administrative order (The Execution Codes of Grouping Practice for Junior High School Pupils)
<p>Revised the grouping regulation to:</p> <p>All grades of junior level education are mandated to use mixed-ability grouping: Pupil allocation should be conducted based on pupils’ IQ scores or through an open lottery. If pupils’ IQ scores are utilised, pupils’ scores should be ranked first and then pupils should be grouped based on the S-shape selection of their ranks. If an open lottery is applied, then pupils should draw their placements by themselves.</p> <p>The mixed-ability groups that pupils are placed in in the first grade should be kept the same without adjustment in the second and the third grades.</p> <p>The leading teachers in the mixed-ability classes should be decided by an open lottery.</p> <p>Revised the code: <i>‘In order to improve vocational education, junior high schools can establish vocational classes in the third grade, but the establishment of a fixed ‘vocational class’ and an ‘advanced school entry class’ is not allowed’ to ‘<u>Junior high schools could follow the ‘Regulation of Junior High Level Vocational Education’ to improve the vocational education for the third grade pupils</u>’.</i></p> <p>Add one code: Under the principle of using mixed-ability grouping, the third grade of junior high level education could establish different groups with regard to pupils’ future paths to accommodate the different interests, aptitudes, ability and needs of pupils based on the curriculum guidelines, pupils’ preference and the resources of the school.</p> <p>The grouping of pupils should be conducted discretely and special meetings should be held to make the decision.</p> <p>The grouping of pupils should follow the preferences of parents or pupils.</p>
1997: Administrative order (The Execution Codes of Grouping Practice for Junior High School Pupils)
Revised the grouping regulation to:

All grades of junior high level education are mandated to use mixed-ability grouping. The mixed-ability groups established in the first grade should be kept through the second and the third grades.

Add code: This regulation applies to both public and private junior high schools.

Add code: To accommodate the individual differences of pupils, setting in maths and English can be establish in the second grade, and setting in maths, English and science can be established in the third grade. The setting of maths and science can be combined into one set.

Add code: The junior high school needs to report to and be permitted by its educational authority to utilise a different grouping practice for special education, educational experiments or sport talented classes.

Add code: In order to accommodate pupils' individual needs, junior high schools should utilise individual teaching or remedial teaching for pupils with excellent or laggard attainments.

Add code: The central or the local educational authorities should praise and reward the schools that implement mixed-ability grouping, pathway grouping, and vocational education well.

Add code: The implementation of the policy would become a criterion to evaluate school principals. If the school is reported and confirmed to be violating the regulation, the principal and relevant administrators would be sanctioned based on the 'Standard of the Reward and Sanction Imposed on Governmental Employees. '

2004: Law— 'Compulsory Education Act', Article No. 12

All grades in primary and junior high level education should group pupils in mixed-ability groups. Setting could be adopted in order to accommodate pupils' individual differences. The Ministry of Education should issue the relevant regulations.

2005: Law—'The Regulations of the Mixed-ability Grouping and Setting Policy in Primary and Junior High Schools

Addition and revision:

Code 2: The grouping practice of public and private schools should follow this regulation unless it is regulated through the Special Education Act, the Art Education Act or other legislation.

Code 4: All grades in primary and junior high school should group pupils in mixed-ability groups.

Code 5: Every county should establish a 'Mixed-ability Grouping Promotion Committee' which would be in charge of the promotion of the utilisation of mixed-ability grouping.

The committee should be constituted with 11 to 17 members and the chairman of the committee should be held by the director of the local educational authority.

The members should include officers in the local educational authority, principals in primary and junior high schools, the representatives of local teachers' associations, the representatives of local parents' associations, and scholars and experts. Among them, the number of representatives from local teachers' associations and local parents' associations should not be less than one third of the members respectively.

Code 6: The grouping of pupils of primary and junior high schools should be conducted by the local educational authority or the appointed schools. The methods which can be used to group pupils are as follows: Using an S-shape model to allocate pupils based on pupils' attainment ranking. Using an open lottery. Using random allocation.

Pupils who transfer from other schools after the school's completion of pupil grouping should be assigned to a class by an open lottery.

The process of grouping pupils into classes should be made known to the public. Parents should be notified and invited to the occasions when pupils' assignment being made and the officers of the local educational authority should supervise the process.

The result of pupils' allocation should be published within 15 days after the completion of the above procedure. Within seven days after the results have been published, the leading teachers of classes should be decided by an open lottery.

Code 8: Setting of pupils can be conducted in the second grade of junior high level education in maths and English, and in the third grade of junior high level education in maths, science and English.

Code 11: The 'Mixed-ability Grouping Promotion Committee' should design the evaluation system to evaluate the implementation of the policy and they should submit an evaluation report at the end of every school year. The committee could propose the reward and sanction to the local educational authority based on the evaluation.

Code 12: The evaluation of the implementation of the policy should be one of the criteria used to form the overall school evaluation and the principals' merit check. The report will also be considered in future principal selection. The principal and the relevant administrators of the schools that violate the policy should be sanctioned according to the regulations.

Appendix 3: The Ministry of Education Enhancing the Implementation of the Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy Implementation Plan

By Ministry of Education 2003, November, 11

1. Mission:

In an environment that society values credential competition, streaming has been adopted as a tool to boost schools' senior high school entry rates. The streaming adopted in early years also indirectly resulted in many social problems, which hinders the ideals of improving justice and equality in society.

In order to pursue social justice and the educational ideals, the Ministry of Education issued the mixed-ability grouping policy and revised the "Execution Codes of Grouping Practice for Junior High School Pupils" several times in the hope of improving junior high level education. The methods of pupil organisation are crucial to the realisation of the ideals of 'bringing up every child and teaching them in accordance with their abilities', which aim to provide every pupil with the best learning environment and the opportunities to reach their full potential.

This implementation plan demands every level of educational authorities and the schools to implement the mixed-ability grouping policy and to realise the ideals of 'teaching every pupil well' and 'never giving up any child'.

2. Objectives:

- 1) To ensure the 'normalisation of teaching' in junior high schools in order to protect pupils' rights to learn.
- 2) To establish an environment that is positive to pupils' development of mental and physical ability.

3. Principles:

- 1) *Differentiated responsibilities*: the governance of the compulsory education is the responsibility of the local educational authority; the Ministry of Education issues this implementation plan based on the responsibility endowed by 'Compulsory Education Act' to supervise the governance of local educational authority.
- 2) *Promote the implementation*: mixed-ability grouping is the most suitable classroom teaching method for the present educational environments. This policy should be carried out by the Ministry of Education, the local educational authorities and the schools together.
- 3) *Reward and punishment*: reward those who implement the policy well and sanction those who fail the implementation.
- 4) *Self-criticise and revise*: this implementation plan will be revised continuously based on our self-criticism.

4. The implementation plan

1) The Ministry of Education

<i>Tasks</i>	<i>Working units</i>	<i>Date of completion</i>
Enforce the mixed-ability grouping policy through law to endow legal basis to the methods of pupil organisation	Department of Compulsory Education	Jun/2004
Establish the detailed implementation plan	Department of Compulsory Education	Oct/2003
Inspect the local educational authorities and the schools when necessary	Department of Compulsory Education and Inspectoral office	When necessary
Promote the mixed-ability grouping policy and related implementation details in the national 'local educational authority meetings' and other meetings.	Department of Compulsory Education	When necessary
Inspect the results in relation to the schools' implementation submitted by the local educational authorities	Department of Compulsory Education and Inspectoral office	Often
Assess the implementation of the local educational authorities and use the results as references for the fiscal subsidies.	Department of Compulsory Education	When necessary

2) The Local Educational Authority

<i>Tasks</i>	<i>Working Units</i>	<i>Date of completion</i>
Follow the policy to establish local guidelines	Local educational authorities	Nov/ 2003
Establish local implementation plan	Local educational authorities	Oct/ 2003
Improve the local assessment mechanism	Local educational authorities	Often
Establish a complaint hotline and a mailbox and to inspect the lodged complaints.	Local educational authorities	From Oct/ 2003
Promote the ideals of the policy in principal meetings	Local educational authorities	Often
Impose rewards and sanctions: 1. The sanctions will be imposed based on 'Standard for Reward and Sanction for Educational Professionals' 2. The result of the implementation of the schools will be taken into consideration in the annual assessment of school principals.	Local educational authorities, Local personnel office	Often
The results of school inspection should be submitted to the Ministry of Education	Local educational authorities, Local personnel office	Often

3) **The Schools**

<i>Tasks</i>	<i>Date of completion</i>
Follow the policy and local guidelines to establish school guidelines	Oct/ 2003
Establish school level implementation plan	Oct/ 2003
Improve the promotion of the policy: 1. Promote the mixed-ability grouping policy in school teaching affairs meeting, parents' association, class-parents meetings and other appropriate occasions. 2. Inform the parents about the mixed-ability grouping guidelines and the complaints hotline	Every semester, suitable meetings and occasions
Organise pupils in public occasion with an advance announcement to invite parents to participate and observe the grouping procedure	Every semester and the date for pupils organization
Keep all related documents well for inspections and assessment	Often

5. Budget

The expenditure of the policy is included in the regular annual educational budget.

6. Outcome assessment

- 1) The Ministry of Education, the local educational authorities and the schools should assess the implementation regularly.
- 2) The reward and sanction should be imposed based on schools' implementation.
- 3) The result of implementation in the local educational authorities will become an indicator for the Ministry of Education to distribute subsidies to the local educational authorities.
- 4) The result of implementation in the schools will become an indicator of the yearly principal assessment.

7. Other

Other related affairs should be conducted under the related legislation and regulations.

Appendix 4: Principal Questionnaire—

Attitudes towards the Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy and Issues Raised

© Introduction

This questionnaire includes two parts: background information and questions. There are three sections of questions. Please first read the questions carefully, and then answer the questions accordingly. There are no standard answers of questions, please answer them based on your experience and opinions.

© Background information

01. Your gender : 1. ☐ Male 2. ☐ Female
02. Your age : _____
03. You have taught for _____ year(s)
04. You have been a principal for _____ year(s)
05. Your professional area :
1. ☐ Language (☐ Mandarin ☐ English ☐ Other) 2. ☐ Math
3. ☐ Social studies 4. ☐ Health and PE 5. ☐ Science and Life technology
6. ☐ Art and Humanity 7. ☐ Integrated activity
8. ☐ Other _____
06. Your local authority : _____ County (City) _____ Town
07. How would you describe the local area of the school :
1. ☐ Urban area 2. ☐ Rural area 3. ☐ Remote area 4. ☐ Other
07. School pupils in the school : There are _____ classes for 3 grades.
- There are approximately _____ pupils in each class.
08. Please describe the average social economic background of your pupils' family:
1. ☐ lower than average ☐ Average ☐ Higher than average

© Questions start

A. Attitudes towards the mixed-ability grouping policy

1. What are your opinions of the following arguments about the mixed-ability grouping policy?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1) It increases overall pupils' confidence of learning					
2) Pupils with lower academic ability lose confidence of learning in mixed-ability class					
3) It increases overall pupils' academic attainments					
4) It decreases overall pupils' academic attainments					
5) Pupils with higher academic ability feel board in mixed-ability class					
6) It infringes pupil's chance of entering a better senior high school					
7) It normalises the school teaching(rather than teaching to test)					
8) It makes teaching more difficult					
9) It equalises the distribution of educational resources					
10) It goes against parents' preference for streaming					

2. Have teachers in your school ever made the following arguments while practicing the mixed-ability grouping policy?

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1) It increases overall pupils' confidence of learning				
2) Pupils with lower academic ability lose confidence of learning in mixed-ability class				
3) It increases overall pupils' academic attainments				
4) It decreases overall pupils' academic attainments				
5) Pupils with higher academic ability feel board in mixed-ability class				
6) It infringes pupil's chance of entering a better senior high school				
7) It normalises the school teaching(rather than teaching to test)				
8) It makes teaching more difficult				
9) It equalises the distribution of educational resources				
10) It goes against parents' preference for streaming				

3. Have teachers who questioned the policy proposed following advices? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Use streaming in every grade
- ☐ Use banding
- ☐ All of the five main subjects should be taught in set classes
- ☐ Establish extra class for students with higher attainments
- ☐ Establish extra class for students with lower attainments
- ☐ Start setting in the first year of junior high school rather than only in the 2nd and 3rd grades
- ☐ Do not use setting in all subjects or grades
- ☐ Establish different kind of gifted or talent classes
- ☐ Other, please specify_____

4. In general, what is the attitude of teachers towards the mixed-ability grouping policy?

- ☐ Support ☐ Partially support ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Partially question ☐ Question

5. What is your own attitude towards the mixed-ability grouping policy?

- ☐ Support ☐ Partially support ☐ Neutral
☐ Partially question ☐ Question

6. Has your school ever encountered the parents' request of streaming students while adopting the mixed-ability grouping policy?

- ☐ Most of the parents have requested it
☐ About half amount of school parents have requested it
☐ Few parents have requested it
☐ No (Please go directly to question 12)

7. How do parents address their request? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Bring up the issue to the teachers or the principal individually
☐ Bring up the issue to the principal through school parents association
☐ Bring up the issue to the local educational authority through the school parents association or the local parents association
☐ Bring up the issue to the school or the local educational authority through county councillors
☐ Other, please specify _____

8. What are the arguments that have been raised by parents to ask school to use streaming?

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1) To teach pupils with different abilities in streamed classes is more rational				
2) Pupils with better ability shouldn't be sacrificed in mixed-ability groups				
3) Less able students should obtain more support				
4) Mixed-ability grouping will decrease pupils' opportunity to enter a better senior high school				
5) Mixed-ability grouping will increase behaviour problems				
6) Other schools use streaming				
7) Will transfer pupils out of school if the school does not use streaming				
8) Other, please specify _____				

9. Have parents who questioned the policy proposed following advices? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Use streaming in every grade
- ☐ Use banding
- ☐ All of the five main subjects should be taught in ability grouping classes
- ☐ Establish extra class for students with higher attainments
- ☐ Establish extra class for students with lower attainments
- ☐ Start setting in the first year of junior high school rather than only in the 2nd and 3rd grades
- ☐ Do not use setting in all subjects or grades
- ☐ Establish different kind of gifted or talent classes
- ☐ Other, please specify_____

10. What are the other methods and arguments you apply to deal with parents' requests of streaming?

11. Have the requests from parents hindered the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy in your school?

- ☐ Seriously influence ☐ Slightly influence ☐ No influence

(See next page)

B. Issues raised by the policy

a. Teaching in mixed-ability classrooms

12. Have teachers ever mentioned the following opinions about teaching in mixed-ability grouping classroom?

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1) Decreasing the efficiency of teaching				
2) It is difficult to design lesson plans that are suitable for pupils of varying abilities.				
3) Mixed-ability grouping increase the variety of teaching in classrooms.				
4) It will be difficult to manage classroom discipline.				
5) The current class size is too large for mixed-ability teaching.				
6) Mixed-ability grouping will enhance cooperative learning				
7) There are only a few opportunities for teachers to learn and discuss mixed-ability teaching				
8) Increasing the amount of class preparation				
9) Other, please specify _____				

13. Have your school ever held meetings discussing the teaching in mixed-ability classroom?

☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

14. Have teachers in your school discussed teaching in mixed-ability classroom in different 'learning area teams'?

☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

15. How do school deal with the difficulty in teaching mixed-ability classes?

16. Does the difficulty of teaching in mixed-ability classes hinder the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy in your school?

☐ Seriously influence ☐ Slightly influence ☐ No influence

b. Mixed-ability grouping and entering high school mechanism

17. How does the current entering high school mechanism affect the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy? (Check all that apply)

- 1) ☐ Parents request streaming in order to increase their children's chance of entering a better senior high school.
- 2) ☐ The schools want to provide streamed classes for students who have a higher chance of entering better high schools.
- 3) ☐ The senior high school entry rate affects a school's reputation; using streaming may increase pupils' chance of entering a better senior high school.
- 4) ☐ The senior high school entry rate affects the enrolment of a school. Schools need to use streaming to encourage pupils to enrol.
- 5) ☐ The senior high school entry system still emphasises students' academic attainments, which will influence teachers' willingness to teach in a mixed-ability classroom.
- 6) ☐ The senior high school entry system is more flexible now, which will facilitate the practice of mixed-ability grouping.
- 7) ☐ The testing questions in the senior high school entry examination now focus on basic ability, which makes teachers more likely to want to teach in mixed-ability classrooms.
- 8) ☐ No influence
- 9) ☐ Other, please specify _____

18. How has school faced the possible challenge brought by the entering high school mechanism?

19. According to your experience, does the entering high school rates of students differ from streamed class and mixed-ability grouping class?

- ☐ The senior high school entry rate is higher while using mixed-ability grouping
- ☐ The senior high school entry rate is higher while using streaming
- ☐ No significant difference, but the 'star' senior high school entry rate is higher while using streaming
- ☐ No significant difference, but the 'star' senior high school entry rate is higher while using mixed-ability grouping
- ☐ No difference
- ☐ Other, please specify_____

c. The factors

20. How would you consider the importance of these aspects that may hinder the practice of the policy? Please rank in order of importance (i.e. 1,2,3 etc.)

- ☐ School educators' disputes over the rationales of the policy
- ☐ Difficulty in teaching in mixed-ability classrooms
- ☐ Pressure from parents
- ☐ Influence of the senior high school entry system and examination
- ☐ Other schools still use streaming
- ☐ The assessment of local educational authority is not functioning
- ☐ Other, please specify_____

21. How would you consider the importance of these factors that may improve the practice the mixed-ability policy? Please rank in order of importance (i.e. 1,2,3 etc.)

- ☐ Initiate 12-year compulsory education
- ☐ Abolish the senior high school entry examination
- ☐ Cut class size
- ☐ Improve school's ability to gain parents' support of the policy
- ☐ Provide training so teachers have the ability to teach mixed-ability groups
- ☐ Schools should improve their communication with parents about the mixed-ability grouping policy
- ☐ The procedure of grouping pupils should be controlled by the local educational authority rather than by individual schools
- ☐ Improve the quality of the assessment conducted by the local educational authority
- ☐ Other, please specify_____

C. Class organization in your school

22. What are the following grouping methods your school using now?

Methods	Yes	No	Notation of difference
1) Use mixed-ability grouping in the 7 th , 8 th and 9 th grades, no setting of subjects applied			
2) Use mixed-ability grouping in the 7 th , 8 th and 9 th grades. Use vocational and academic banding in the 9 th grade.			
3) Use mixed-ability grouping in the 7 th , 8 th and 9 th grades, use setting in certain subjects in the 8th and 9 th grades.			
4) Establish gifted classes for English, maths and science.			
5) Establish gifted classes for music or art.			
6) Establish gifted classes for PE			
7) Use setting in vacation extra classes or after-school extra classes			
8) Use streaming in vacation extra classes or after-school extra classes			
9) Other, please specify_____			

23. For which subjects in which year, if any, do you use setting? (check all that apply)

	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9
Maths			
Mandarin			
Science and Life Tech			
Social studies			
Art and Humanities			
Integrated curriculum			
Health and PE			

24. How did the school decide the method of class organization?

- ☐ Decided in school teaching committee with teachers and parents representatives
- ☐ Decided by principal
- ☐ Decided by principal and classes' main teachers
- ☐ Follow the policy directly without internal discussion
- ☐ Other, please specify_____

25. If your school has established gifted classes, what are the rationales for your school to establish them? (check all that apply)

- ☐ To discover gifted pupils in the schools
- ☐ To group gifted pupils in order to provide them with adequate education
- ☐ To attract pupils with different gifts
- ☐ Because other schools establish gifted classes
- ☐ Due to parents' request
- ☐ Other, please specify_____

26. According to your understanding, does the argument that 'some schools establish gifted class to escape the prohibition of using streaming' match the real phenomenon in schools in your county?

- ☐ Mostly match ☐ Partially match ☐ Not match ☐ Not sure

27. According to your understating, are the methods of class organisation used in your school common in your located county?

- ☐ Yes, it is common ☐ Some schools use the similar method
- ☐ It is not common ☐ Not sure

28. According to your understanding, how do junior high schools in your county organise their students?

- ☐ All adopt mixed-ability grouping policy ☐ Some use streaming
- ☐ Most of them use streaming ☐ All use stream
- ☐ Other, please specify_____

29. Are there any other comments you would like to make and/or areas we might not have covered earlier?

Thank you very much for your important opinions!

Appendix 5: Research Consent Form

Introduction

Research	Mixed-ability grouping in junior high schools in Taiwan: influences on policy and practice
School	University of Edinburgh, Moray House School of Education Department of Education and Society
Researcher	Ling-Ying Lu
Supervisor	Professor David Raffe; Dr. Lorna Hamilton
Purpose	The research is about the mixed-ability grouping policy in Taiwan. Researcher will conduct questionnaire survey, interview and documentary analysis in order to understand the practice of the policy and power relationship in the process of the policy.

I agree to take part in the above research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I may keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to be interviewed by the researcher and I may allow the interview to be videotaped/audiotaped.

This information will be held and processed for Ling-Ying Lu's PHD. research project. I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. The identifiable data will not be shared with any other organisation.

I understand that I will be given a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before it is included in the write up of the research

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

Name: _____(print)Signature_____.Date: _____

Researcher Signature:_____

Appendix 6: Interview Questions

Interview questions for officers in Ministry of Education

1. What are the main reasons for the Ministry of Education to keep promoting the mixed-ability grouping policy and to enforce the policy through law in 2004?
2. What are the influences that affect the revision of an educational policy? How have the Ministry of Education taken the opinions of different policy actors into account?
3. What are the changes that resulted from enforcing the mixed-ability grouping policy through law?
4. How have the Ministry of Education provided resources and supports to the local educational authorities and the schools to implement the policy?
5. How have the Ministry of Education assessed the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping in the local educational authorities?
6. What are the barriers that you consider as hindering the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy?
7. There are several arguments about the difficulties of adopting mixed-ability grouping in junior high schools, such as the influence of parents, difficulty of teaching in mixed-ability class, and the influence of the senior high school entry system. How has the Ministry of Education reacted to these arguments?
8. What do you think may improve the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy?
9. How do you view your role in the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy?

Interview questions for officers in local educational authority

1. What is the general attitude of the local educational authority to the current mixed-ability grouping policy?
2. Are there any changes resulted from the mixed-ability grouping policy being enforced through law?
3. According to your assessment, how is the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy in the schools in this county?
4. There are several arguments about the difficulties of adopting mixed-ability grouping in junior high schools, such as the influence of parents, difficulty of teaching in mixed-ability class, and the influence of the senior high school entry system. How has the local educational authority reacted to these arguments?

5. How have you helped schools to implement the policy?
6. Have you established the 'Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy Promotion Committee'? Who are the members of the committee? How does this committee work?
7. How do you assess the implementation of the policy in schools? (the methods, the process, and the key elements for evaluation)
8. What are the barriers that you consider as hindering the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy?
9. What is your opinion towards the argument that county should have the autonomy to decide the method of class organisation?
10. How do you view your role in the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy?
11. What do you think may improve the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy?

Interview questions for school principals

1. What is your general attitude towards the current mixed-ability grouping policy?
2. What are the main reasons for you to support or question this policy?
3. Are there any materials in relation to the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy in place to help the school adopt mixed-ability grouping?
4. According to your understanding, what is the general attitude towards the policy of the teachers in the school? Are their attitudes different with each other? If so, how does the school deal with these different opinions?
5. Are there any struggles inside the school in the process of adopting this policy? How has it been presented and dealt with?
 - 5.1 How do teachers teach in mixed-ability classrooms? How does the practice affect teachers' and your attitudes towards this policy?
 - 5.2 How do parents affect the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy?
 - 5.3 How does the senior high school entry system affect the practice of the policy?
6. There is a criticism indicating that schools create 'gifted class' to group higher attaining pupils without providing adequate 'gifted education'. What is your opinion about this criticism?
7. How does the local educational authority assess and support the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy?
8. We know that there are interest groups intervene with the practice of the policy from different perspectives. Do their actions affect schools' practice of the policy?
9. How do you view current principal's role in the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy?
10. What do you think may improve the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy?

Interview questions for teachers

1. What is your general attitude towards the current mixed-ability grouping policy?
2. What are the main reasons for you to support or question this policy?
3. Are there any materials in relation to the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy in place to help the school adopt mixed-ability grouping?
4. According to your understanding, what is the general attitude towards the policy of the principal and the teachers in school? Are their attitudes different with each other? How does the school deal with these different opinions?
5. How do parents affect the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy?
6. How does the senior high school entry system affect your practice of this policy?
7. There is a criticism indicating that schools create 'gifted class' to group higher attaining pupils without providing adequate 'gifted education'. What is your opinion about this criticism?
8. From your experience, how would you describe the difference in teaching a mixed-ability class and a streamed class? What are the main difficulties in teaching mixed-ability classes? Please give some examples about how you prepare and teach in different kinds of classes.
10. Have you ever discussed the issue of mixed-ability grouping and streaming in teacher training program?
11. Have you ever learned how to teach mixed-ability groups in teacher training program?
12. Is there any mechanism in the school for teachers to discuss teaching in mixed-ability groups and general teaching problems?
13. We know that there are interest groups intervene in the practice of the policy from different perspectives. Do their actions affect schools' practice of the policy?
14. How do you view current teacher's role in the process of the mixed-ability grouping policy?
15. What do you think may improve the practice of the mixed-ability grouping policy?

Bibliography

- 410 Education Reform Alliance. (1996). *Blueprint of the civil education reform*. Taipei: China Times Publishing
- Abraham, J. (1989). Testing Hargreaves' and Lacey's Differentiation-Polarisation Theory in a Setted Comprehensive. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 40(1), 46-81.
- Abraham, J. (1995). *Divide and School: Gender and class dynamics in comprehensive education*. London: The Flamer Press.
- Abraham, J. (2007). Differentiation between and synthesizing quantitative, qualitative, and longitudinal research on polarized school cultures: a comment on Van Houtte. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 39(5), 597-602.
- Abraham, J. (2008). Pupils' perceptions of setting and beyond-a response to Hallam and Ireson. *British Educational Research Journal*, 34(6), 855-863.
- Ahier, J., Cosin, B., & Hales, M. (Eds.). (1996). *Diversity and Change: Education, Policy and Selection*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Alexander, J., Walsh, P., Jarman, R., & Billy, M. (2008). From rhetoric to reality: advancing literacy by cross-curricular means. *Curriculum Journal*, 19(1), 23-35.
- Alexander, K. L., Cook, M., & McDill, E. L. (1978). Curriculum Tracking and Educational Stratification: Some Further Evidence. *American Sociological Review*, 43(1), 47-66.
- Apple, M., W. (1979). *Ideology and Curriculum*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Apple, M., W. (1995). *Education and Power* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Apple, M., W. (1996). *Cultural Politics and Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Araújo, M. (2007). 'Modernising the comprehensive principle': selection, setting and the institutionalisation of education failure *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 28(2), 241-257.
- Argys, L. M., Rees, D. I., & Brewer, D. J. (1996). Detracking America's School: Equity at Zero Cost? *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 15(4), 623-645.
- Arum, R., & Beattie, I. R. (Eds.). (2000). *The Structure of Schooling: Readings in the Sociology of Education*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.
- Au, W. (2008). Between education and the economy: high-stakes testing and the contradictory location of the new middle class. *Journal of Education Policy*, 23(5), 501-513.
- Bacchi, C. (2000). Policy as Discourse: what does it mean? where does it get us? *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*, 21(1), 45-57.
- Ball, S. J. (1981). *Beachside Comprehensive*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ball, S. J. (1987). *The Micro-Politics of the School: towards a theory of school organization*. London: Routledge.

- Ball, S. J. (1990). *Politics and Policy Making in Education: explorations in policy sociology*. London: Routledge.
- Ball, S. J. (1994). *Education Reform: a critical and post-structural approach*. Buckingham: Open University.
- Ball, S. J. (1997). Policy Sociology and Critical Social Research: a personal review of recent education policy and policy research. *British Educational Research Journal*, 23(3), 257-274.
- Ball, S. J. (1998). Big Policies/Small World: An Introduction to international perspectives in education policy. In B. Lingard & J. Ozga (Eds.), *The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Education Policy and Politics* (pp. 36-47). Oxon: Routledge.
- Ball, S. J. (2004). *Education For Sale! The Commodification of Everything?* Paper presented at the King's Annual Education Lecture 2004.
- Ball, S. J. (2006). *Education Policy and Social Class: The Selected Works of Stephen J. Ball*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Ball, S. J. (2008). *The Education Debate*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Banning Streaming, COE Determined to Conduct Inspections. (1982, August 25). *United Daily News*, p. 2.
- Berman, P., & McLaughlin, M. (1978). Federal programs supporting educational change, Vol. VIII: Implementing and sustaining innovations. Rand Corporation.
- Berman, P., & McLaughlin, M. W. (1976). Implementation of Educational Innovation. *Educational Forum*, 40(3), 344-370.
- Bidwell, C. E. (2000). School as Context and Construction: A Social Psychological Approach to the Study of Schooling. In M. T. Hallinan (Ed.), *Handbook of the Sociology of Education* (pp. 15-36). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- Blase, J. (2005). The Micropolitics of Educational Change. In A. Hargreaves (Ed.), *Extending Educational Change: International Handbook of Educational Change* (Vol. 2, pp. 264-277). New York: Springer.
- Bloomer, M. (1997). *Curriculum Making in Post-16 Education: The Social Conditions of Studentship*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Boaler, J. (1997a). Setting, social class and survival of the quickest. *British Educational Research Journal*, 23(5), 575-595.
- Boaler, J. (1997b). When Even the Winners are Losers: Evaluating the Experience of 'top set' students. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 29(2), 165-182.
- Boaler, J., William, D., & Brown, M. (2000). Students' Experience of Ability Grouping: Disaffection, Polarisation and the Construction of Failure. *British Educational Research Journal*, 26(5), 631-648.

- Bob L. Johnson, J. (2001). Micropolitical Dynamics of Education Interests: A View From Within. *Educational Policy*, 15(1), 115-134.
- Bourdieu, P. (2000). Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction. In R. Arum & I. R. Beattie (Eds.), *The Structure of Schooling: Readings in the Sociology of Education*. Mountain View: Mayfield.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (1977). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. London: SAGE.
- Bowe, R., Ball, S. J., & Gold, A. (1992). *Reforming Education & Changing Schools: case studies in policy sociology*. London: Routledge.
- Boyd, W. L. (1978). The Changing Politics of Curriculum Policy-Making for American Schools. *Review of Educational Research*, 48(4), 577-628.
- Boyd, W. L. (1990). *Choice in education : potential and problems*. Richmond, CA: Mccutchan.
- Bribe into Being Placed in Higher Attaining Classes? The Corruption of Education? (1987, November 12). *United Daily News*, p. 8.
- Broaded, C. M. (1997). The Limits and Possibilities of Tracking: some Evidence from Taiwan. *Sociology of Education*, 70(1), 36-53.
- Brown, P., & Tannock, S. (2009). Education, meritocracy and the global war for talent. *Journal of Education Policy*, 24(4), 377-392.
- Burgess, R. G. (1984). *In the Field: An Introduction to Field Research*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Chang, C.-C. (2005). The Complementary Actions Should be Taken to Implement the Mixed-ability Grouping Policy. *Teachers Say*(師說-中華民國全國教育會會訊), 185, 4-7.
- Chang, C.-H. (1996). Is the Objectives of Education the Development of Economy? Executive Yuan Education Reform Committee.
- Chang, C.-H. (2006, May 13). 20,000 Elementary School Graduates Registered the Gifted Class Joint Examination. *United Daily News*, p. C4.
- Chang, C.-H. (2007). Post-war Taiwan's Economic Development. *Educational Resources and Research*(教育資料與研究), 12, 31-48.
- Chang, C.-H., & Kuo, S.-Y. (1984). The survey of the problems of grouping practice in junior high schools. *Bulletin of Educational Psychology*(教育心理學報), 17, 15-50.
- Chang, D.-R. (1998). The lesson of school choice policy--examples in the U.S. *Educational Policy Educational Policy Forum*(教育政策論壇), 1(1), 86-101.
- Chang, F.-C. (2002). *The Policies of the Ministers of the Ministry of Education*. Taipei: Shang Ting Culture(商鼎文化).
- Chang, F.-C. (2005). *The Thoughts of Educational Issue*. Taipei: Psychological Publishing.

- Chang, H.-H. (1975). *The relationship between the grouping practice in junior high school and pupils' learning motivation*. Unpublished master thesis, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei.
- Chang, P.-S. (2006). When the Mixed-ability Grouping Policy Encounters the Parental Choice of Schools. *Educational Trend Papers*, 18, 12-18.
- Chang, Y.-F. (2009). A Study on the Policy of Normal Class Grouping Implementation: Take English Teaching as an Example. *Secondary Education (中等教育)*, 60(3), 110-127.
- Chang, Y.-H., Hsueh, C.-T., & Hwang, Y.-J. (1996). Educational Tracking and Social Economic Status: The Meaning to the Reform of Vocational Education. Executive Yuan Education Reform Committee.
- Chang, Y.-W., & Ling, W.-Y. (2002). *The Subjectivity and the Objectivity of Credentialism*. Paper presented at the Taiwan Social Problems Research Conference.
- Chen, C.-H. (1990, July 6). There is Positive Side of Streaming. Pupils with Different Ability being Placed in Mixed-ability Classroom hinders Teaching and Learning[Letter to the Editor]. *United Daily News*, p. 26.
- Chen, H.-L. S. (1999). The Ideals and the Challenges of the 9-Year Integrated Curriculum Reform. *Taiwan Education Review(台灣教育)*, 581, 2-8.
- Chen, J.-J. (2003). *The Social Network and the Power Relationship in the Taiwanese Education Reform Movement: A Case Study of the Deregulation of the Primary and Junior High School Textbooks*. Unpublished master thesis, Fo Guang University, Yilan.
- Chen, J.-J., & Liu, J. (2004). The Multi-phase High School Entrance Program and the Equity of Educational Opportunity *Bulletin of Educational Research(教育研究集刊)*, 50(4), 115-146.
- Chen, J.-J., & Liu, J. (2008). *Multi-phased High School Entrance Program and the Equity of Educational Opportunity*. Paper presented at the First ISA Forum of Sociology.
- Chen, M.-C., & Chen, H.-T. (Eds.). (1989). *The Restoration of Taiwan from Japanese Colonisation and the State of affairs in the Early Five Years*. Nanjing: Nanjing Publishing House.
- Chen, P.-C. (1999). Teacher Training System in Transition under the Reposition of Teachers' Role of the 9-Year Integrated Curriculum Reform. In N. C. C. University (Ed.), *The Future of Education in the New Century: Conference papers*. Kaohsiung: Fuwen Publishing.
- Chen, P.-L. (1995). *The Study of Selection and Socialisation for Secondary Education and Their Relationship with Students' self-concept*. Unpublished master thesis, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei.
- Chen, T.-j. (2004). *The Analysis of the 9 year Integrated Curriculum as the Pedagogic*

- Discourse*. Unpublished master thesis, NanHua University, Chiayi.
- Chen, Y. (2003). The Abnormal Teaching is the Source of the Suffering of Teachers and Students: A Reply to the 'Declaration of Reconstructing Education'. Retrieved Jan, 25, 2010, from <http://www.cyberbees.org/blog/archives/000935.html>
- Chen, Y. C. (2005). *Elementary School English Ability Grouping Teaching - A Case Study of Taichung Municipal Dongsing Elementary School*. Unpublished master thesis, National Taipei Normal University.
- Cheng, W.-C. (2001). *Political Control, Education Control and Credentialism: A Historical Sociology Perspective*. Unpublished master thesis, National Tsing Hua University, Hsinchu.
- Cheng, W.-C. (2006, April 25). Vie for Student Enrolment? 19 Schools were Approved to Establish Gifted Classes. *United Daily News*, p. C2.
- Chiang, P.-J. (2004). *A study of the 'move' within Tai-Chung City*. Unpublished master thesis, National Changhua University of Education, Changhua.
- Chien, C.-H. (1999). The Mechanism and Reform of the Advanced School Entry System in Taiwan: The Case of the Senior High School Entry System. *Educational Research & Information(教育研究資訊)*, 7(6), 61-84.
- Chien, H.-C. (2003, October 4). Parents Doubt Mixed-ability Grouping and Change Children's Household Registration. *United Daily News*, p. B2.
- Chien, H.-C. (2004a, June 12). Parents Opposed Mixed-ability Grouping. *United Daily News*, p. B2.
- Chien, H.-C. (2004b, May 22). Principals are Worried about Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy. *United Daily News*, p. B2.
- Chien, H.-C. (2007, September 13). Establish More Gifted Classes in Junior High Schools? Survey Shows that Parents have Contradictory Attitudes. *United Daily News*. p. C1.
- Chien, T.-L. (2004). Is Streaming a Monster? *The Educator Monthly(師友月刊)*, 446, 17-20.
- Chien, T.-L. (2005). The Game of Cat Catching Rats in Education-Mixed-ability Grouping vs. the Establishment of Gifted Classes. *The Educator Monthly*, 461, 47-51.
- Chien, Y.-L. (2004). The Should Be and the Present of the Grouping Practice in Junior High Schools. *Teachers Say(師說-中華民國全國教育會會訊)*, 179, 34-35.
- Chiou, J.-W. (1996). The Pilot Implementation and the Examination of the Junior High School Graduates Voluntarily Entering Senior High School Program in Kaohsiung City. *Educational Articles(教育文粹)* 25, 48-56.
- Chiu, A.-L. (1998). *A Study of Changes of the Joint College Entrance Examination Policies in Taiwan from 1954 to 1997*. Unpublished Doctoral thesis, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei.

- Chiu, S.-Y. (1992, April 21). Need to Decrease the Pressure on Pupils in Higher Attaining Classes and Help the Pupils in Higher Attaining Classes. *United Daily News*, p. 10.
- Chou, C.-h. (1995). The Content of the Educational Fundamental Act: Some Possible Thinking Directions. *Modern Academic Research*(現代學術研究), 7, 41-71.
- Chou, C.-h. (1996). The Research of the Necessity of the Establishment of the Educational Fundamental Act. Executive Yuan Education Reform Committee.
- Chou, C.-h. (2003). *Educational Laws and the Educational Reform*. Taipei: Higher Education(高等教育).
- Chou, C. (2005). Examining the Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy from Considering the Basic Competent Test. *The Educator Monthly*, 458, 26-28.
- Chou, H.-F. (2004). The Relationship among Family Socioeconomic Status, Parental Involvement and Ability Grouping among Junior High School Students. *Taiwan Journal of Sociology of Education*(台灣教育社會學研究), 4(2), 113-153.
- Chou, S.-M. (2001). *A study of 'choice of school by change household registration' in primary school pupils in Tainan City*. Unpublished master thesis, National Tainan University, Tainan.
- Chu, Y.-F. (2007). The Retrospection and the Envision of Research of the Vocational Education Reform. *Inservice Education Bulletin*(研習資訊), 24(3), 127-134.
- Chuang, C.-W. (2006). *The ideology of credentialism and values of achievement : A Historical sociology analysis of stall-families in Feng-Shan District*. Unpublished Doctoral thesis, National Pingtung University, Pingtung.
- Chuang, F.-M. (2002, September 28). Do Junior High Schools Still Use Streaming? Principals Say Yes. *United Daily News*, p. 18.
- Chuang, Y.-P. (2006). *A Study of the Content and Evolution of Normalized Class Assignment Policy in Taiwan*. Unpublished Master thesis, Taipei Municipal University of Education, Taipei.
- Coburn, C. E. (2004). Beyond Decoupling: Rethinking the Relationship Between the Institutional Environment and the Classroom. *Sociology of Education*, 77(3), 211-244.
- Coburn, C. E. (2005). The role of non-system actors in the relationship between policy and practice: The case of reading instruction in California. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 27(1), 23-52.
- Coburn, C. E. (2006). Framing the Problem of Reading Instruction: Using Frame Analysis to Uncover the Microprocess of Policy Implementation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(3), 343-379.
- Codd, J. A. (1988). The construction and deconstruction of educational policy documents. *Journal of Education Policy*, 3(3), 235-247.

- Compulsory Education Act. Article 9. (2010 version).
- Compulsory Education Act. Article 10. (2010 version).
- Compulsory Education Act. Article 12. (2004).
- Compulsory Education Act. Article 19. (2010 version).
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative research. . *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124-130.
- Croxford, L., & Raffe, D. (2007). Education Markets and Social Class Inequality: A Comparison of Trends in England, Scotland and Wales. In R. Teese, S. Lamb & M. Duru-Bellat (Eds.), *International Studies in Educational Inequality, Theory and Policy* (Vol. 3, pp. 39-66). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
- Cuban, L. (1990). Reforming Again, Again, and Again. *Educational Researcher*, 19(1), 3-13.
- Cuban, L. (1998). How Schools Change Reforms: Redefining Reform Success and Failure. *Teachers College Record*, 99(3), 453-477.
- Cuban, L. (2008). US school reform and classroom practice. In C. Sugrue (Ed.), *The Future of Educational Change* (pp. 75-88). Oxon: Routledge.
- Dale, R. (1986). Perspectives on Policy-Making (Module 1 of E333, Policy-making in Education). In. Milton Keynes: Open University.
- Dale, R. (1989). *The State and Education Policy*. Milton Keynes: Open University.
- Dale, R. (1992). Review: Whither the State and Education Policy? Recent Work in Australia and New Zealand. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 13(3), 387-395.
- Dale, R. (1997). The State and the Governance of Education: An Analysis of the Restructuring of the State-Education relationship. In A. H. Halsey, H. Lauder, P. Brown & A. S. Wells (Eds.), *Education, Culture, Economy, and Society* (pp. 273-282). Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dale, R. (2005). Globalisation, knowledge economy and comparative education. *Comparative Education*, 41(2), 117-149.
- Darling-Hammond. (1990). Instructional Policy into Practice: "The Power of the Bottom over the Top". *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 12(3), 339-347.
- Datnow, A. (2006). Connections in the Policy Chain: The "Co-construction" of Implementation in Comprehensive School Reform. In M. I. Honig (Ed.), *New Directions in Education Policy Implementation: Confronting Complexity* (pp. 105-124). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Derouet, J.-L. (2000). School autonomy in a society with multi-faceted political references: the search for new ways of coordinating action. *Journal of Education Policy*, 15(1), 61-69.
- Dore, R. *The Diploma Disease: Education, Qualification and Development*. London:

- Institution of Education, University of London.
- Duke, K. (2002). Getting beyond the 'official line': reflections on dilemmas of access, knowledge and power in researching policy networks. *Journal of Social Policy*, 31(1), 39-59.
- Dweck, C. S. (1999). *Self-Theories: Their role in motivation, personality, and development*. Philadelphia, PA: The Psychology Press.
- Echols, F., McPherson, A., & Willms, J. D. (1990). Parental choice in Scotland. *Journal of Education Policy*, 5(3), 207-222.
- Educational Fundamental Act. (1999).
- Educational Fundamental Act. Article 10. (1999).
- Educational Research Committee of the Ministry of Education. (1992). *The Briefing of the Junior High School Graduates Voluntarily Senior High School Entry Program*. Taipei, Taiwan: Ministry of Education.
- Educators Put Pressure on the Government and the Schools in order to Protect Students' Learning Right and to Save the Distorted Education. (1990, December 4). *United Daily News*, p. 15.
- Edwards, T., Gewirtz, S., & Whitty, G. (1992). Whose Choice of Schools? Making Sense of City Technology Colleges. In M. Arnot & L. Barton (Eds.), *Voicing Concerns: sociological perspective on contemporary education reform* (pp. 143-162). Oxfordshire: Triangle.
- Executive Yuan Council For Economic Planning and Development. (1973a). The Fourth Phase of Human Power Development Plan. The Executive Yuan Council For Economic Planning and Development.
- Executive Yuan Council For Economic Planning and Development. (1973b). The Sixth Phase of the Four-Year Economic Planning and Development Plan. The Executive Yuan Council For Economic Planning and Development.
- Executive Yuan Education Reform Committee. (1996). *The Executive Yuan Education Reform Consultation Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.sinica.edu.tw/info/edu-reform/>.
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing Discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Feng, C.-H. (1996). *The Implementation of Mixed-ability Grouping in Taipei: Some factors*. Unpublished master thesis, National Taiwan Normal University.
- Fitz, J., & Halpin, D. (1990). Researching Grant Maintained Schools. *Journal of Education Policy*, 5(2), 167-180.
- Fitz, J., Halpin, D., & Power, S. (1994). Implementation Research and Education Policy: Practice and Prospects. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 42(1), 53-69.

- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (edited by Colin Gordon). London.: Harvester.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gale, T. (2001). Critical policy sociology: historiography, archaeology and genealogy as methods of policy analysis. *Journal of Education Policy*, 16(5), 379-393.
- Gale, T. (2006). Towards a Theory and Practice of Policy Engagement: Higher Education Research Policy in the Making. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 33(2), 1-13.
- Gamoran, A. (1992). Is Ability Grouping Equitable? *Educational Leadership and Administration*, 50(2), 11-17.
- Gamoran, A., Nystrand, M., Berends, M., & Lepore, P. C. (1995). An Organizational Analysis of the Effects of Ability Grouping. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(4), 687-715.
- Gee, J. P. (1999). *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (2nd ed.). New York & London: Routledge.
- Gewirtz, S., Ball, S. J., & Bowe, R. (1994). Parents, privilege and the education market-place. *Research Papers in Education*, 9(1), 3-29.
- Gewirtz, S., Ball, S. J., & Bowe, R. (1995). *Market, Choice and Equity in Education*. Buckingham: Open University.
- Gewirtz, S., Dickson, M., & Power, S. (2004). Unravelling a 'spun' policy: a case study of the constitutive role of 'spin' in the education policy process. *Journal of Education Policy*, 19(3), 321-342.
- Gillborn, D. (1994). The Micro-Politics of Macro Reform. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 15(2), 147-164.
- Gillborn, D. (1998). Racism, selection, poverty and parents: New Labour, old problems? *Journal of Education Policy*, 13(6), 717-735.
- Gillborn, D., & Youdell, D. (2000). *Rationing Education: Policy, Practice, Reform and Equity*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Goodson, I. (1985). History, Context and Qualitative Methods in the Study of Curriculum. In R. G. Burgess (Ed.), *Issues in Educational Research: qualitative methods*. London: Falmer.
- Gorard, S., & Taylor, C. (2004). *Combining Methods in Educational and Social Research*. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Gordon, J., & A., P. J. (2007). "It's what we've always been doing." Exploring tensions between school culture and change. *Journal of Educational Change*, 9(1), 17-35.
- Grace, G. (1995). *School Leadership: Beyond Education Management: An Essay in Policy*

- Scholarship*. London: Falmer.
- Green, A. (1997a). *Education, Globalization and the Nation State*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Green, A. (1997b). *Education, Globalization and the Nation State* London: Macmillan.
- Gregory, R. P. (1984). Streaming, setting and mixed ability grouping in primary and secondary schools: some research findings. *Educational Studies*, 10(3), 209-226.
- Guttschalk, L., Kluckhohn, C., & Angell, R. (1947). *The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology, and Sociology*. New York: Social Science Research Council.
- Hall, P. M. (1997). Policy as the Transformation of Intentions: Producing Program From Statute. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 38(3), 439-467.
- Hallam, S., & Ireson, J. (2006). Secondary school pupils' preferences for different types of structured grouping practices. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(4), 583-599.
- Hallam, S., Ireson, J., & Davis, J. (2004). Grouping practices in the primary school: what influences change? *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(1), 117-140.
- Hallinan, M. T. (1994). Tracking: From Theory to Practice. *Sociology of Education*, 67(2), 79-84.
- Hallinan, M. T. (2000a). Tracking: From Theory to Practice. In R. Arum & I. R. Beattie (Eds.), *The Structure of Schooling: Readings in the Sociology of Education* (pp. 218-223). Mountain View: Mayfield.
- Hallinan, M. T. (Ed.). (2000b). *Handbook of the Sociology of Education*. New York: Kluwer Academic/ Plenum Publishers.
- Halpin, D., & Troyna, B. (Eds.). (1994). *Researching Education Policy: Ethical and Methodological Issues*. London/Washington D.C.: The Falmer Press.
- Hamilton, L. (2002). Constructing Pupil Identity: personhood and ability. *British Educational Research Journal*, 28(4), 591-602.
- Hamilton, L. (2006). Implicit Theories of Ability: teacher constructs and classroom consequences. *Scottish Educational Review*, 38(2), 201-212.
- Hamilton, L., & O'Hara, P. (2005). Organisation of Learning in Scottish Primary Schools. SEED Report. University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh.
- Han, K.-T. (2006, May 24). MOE: Gifted Students Are Not Allowed to be Grouped in a Fixed Class. *China Times*, p. A7.
- Hanushek, E. A., & Wößmann, L. (2005). Does Educational Tracking Affect Performance and Inequality? Differences-In Differences Evidence Across Countries. SEIPR Discussion Paper No. 04-26. Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research.
- Hargreaves, A. (1985). The Micro-Macro Problems in the Sociology of Education. In R. G. Burgess (Ed.), *Issues in Educational Research: qualitative methods*. London:

Falmer.

- Hargreaves, A. (2002). Sustainability of Educational Change: The Role of Social Geographies. *Journal of Educational Change*, 3(3-4), 289-214.
- Hargreaves, D. H. (1967). *Social Relations in a Secondary School*. London: Routledge.
- Harlen, W., & Malcolm, H. (1999). Setting and Streaming. The Scottish Council for Research in Education.
- Hatch, T. C. (1998). The Differences in Theory That Matter in the Practice of School Improvement. *American Educational Research Journal*, 35(1), 3-31.
- Hatcher, R., & Troyna, B. (1994). The 'Policy Cycle': A Ball by Ball Account. *Journal of Education Policy*, 9(2), 155-170.
- Helsby, G. (1999). *Changing Teachers' Work*. Buckingham: Open University.
- Henry, G. T., Dickey, K. C., & Areson, J. C. (1991). Stakeholder Participation in Educational Performance Monitoring Systems. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 13(2), 177-188.
- Hill, M. (1997). *The Policy Process in the Modern State*. Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Ho, C.-C. (1980). *The Education in Taiwan in Early Period of the Restoration from Japanese Colonisation*. Kaohsiung: Fuwen Publisher.
- Hodgson, A., & Spours, K. (2006). An analytical framework for policy engagement: the contested case of 14-19 reform in England. *Journal of Education Policy*, 21(6), 679-696.
- Hodgson, A., & Spours, K. (2008). *Education & Training 14-19: Curriculum, Qualifications & Organization*. London: SAGE.
- Hodgson, A., & Spours, K. (Eds.). (1997). *Dearing and Beyond: 14-19 Qualifications, Frameworks and Systems*. London/Stirling: Kogan Page Limited.
- Hollis, M. (1982). Education as a positional good. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 16(2), 235-244.
- Honig, M. I. (2003). Building Policy from Practice: District Central Office Administrators' Roles and Capacity for Implementing Collaborative Education Policy. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39(3), 292-338.
- Honig, M. I. (2004). The new middle management: Intermediary organizations in education policy implementation. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 26(1), 65-87.
- Honig, M. I. (2006). Complexity and Policy Implementation: Challenges and Opportunities for the Field. In M. I. Honig (Ed.), *New Directions in Education policy Implementation: Confronting Complexity* (pp. 1-24). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Honig, M. I., & Hatch, T. C. (2004). Crafting Coherence: How Schools Strategically

- Manage Multiple, External Demands. *Educational Researcher*, 33(8), 16-30.
- Hou, S.-C. (2007). The Significance and the Channels for Parents to Participate in Educational Reform. *Inservice Education Bulletin*(研習資訊), 24(2), 15-21.
- Hsiao, H.-H. M. (2004). Non-Governmental Organizations, Democratic Transformation and Democratic Governance in Taiwan. *Taiwan Democracy Quarterly*, 1, 65-84.
- Hsiao, Y.-M. (2004). Hope We Can Have Good Answers for Students. *Humanistic Educational Journal*, 183, 39-40.
- Hsieh, H.-C. (2003). Confrontation, Competition and Cooperation: The Interaction Patterns between the Civil Educational Reform Group and the School System in Taiwan. In H.-w. Wong & F.-s. Hung (Eds.), *Partnerships for Curriculum and Teacher Professional Development* (pp. 19-48). Hong-Kong: The Chinese University Press.
- Hsieh, H.-C., Chang, C.-F., & Huang, S.-L. (1996). The Vocational Education Policy and the Practice of Vocational Schools. Executive Yuan Education Reform Committee.
- Hsieh, H.-F. (2008). *Teachers' negative expressions under credentialism*. Unpublished master thesis, National Chiayi University, Chiayi.
- Hsieh, H.-L. (2004, June 15). Support the Documentary 'Magic Mirror'. HEF: No Truth, No Reform. NTA: the Legislators who Criticised the Documentary were Unjust. *United Daily News*, p. 4.
- Hsieh, L.-Y. (2006, May 18). The Overhaul of the Establishment of Gifted Classes. *United Daily News*, p. C1.
- Hsien, H.-H. (2000). The Civil Society in Taiwan's Political Transition: A Case Study of the Social Movement between 1987 and 1994. *Taiwan Historical Materials Studies*, 16, 55-72.
- Hsien, H. C. (2000). The Longitudinal Survey of the Attainment of Education and Status in Taiwan. Taiwan National Science Council.
- Hsu, H.-C. (1977). The learning emotion and the peer relationships of junior high school pupils in a streamed system. *Assessment of Counselling*(測驗與輔導), 6(5), 394-395.
- Hsu, M.-C. (2001). Will the Junior High School Basic Competence Test Alleviate the Pressure of Senior High School Entry Examination? *NPF Commentary* Retrieved March, 26th, 2008, from <http://old.npf.org.tw/PUBLICATION/EC/090/EC-C-090-083.htm>
- Hsu, M.-C. (2009). The Problems and Reform of the Advanced School Entry System. *NPF Research Report* Retrieved July, 18, 2009, from <http://www.npf.org.tw/post/2/6175>
- Hsu, N.-H. (Ed.). (1993). *The Taiwanese Education History*. Taipei: ShtaBook.
- Hsu, T.-P. (2006). The Problems of the Practice of the 9-Year Integrated Curriculum: The

- 9-Year Integrated Curriculum and the 'One-Guide, Multiple-Text' Textbook policy. *Taiwan Education Review*, 642, 11-20.
- Hsu, Y.-H. (2005). *Pedagogical Practice under Ability Grouping by Art: A Comparison of Junior High Art Class and Regular Class*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei.
- Hsu, Y.-H. (2006a). Ability Grouping by Art and the Equality of Education. *Secondary Education (中等教育)*, 57(6), 92-114.
- Hsu, Y.-H. (2006b). Pedagogical Practice and Student Identity: The Comparison of an Art Class and a Regular Class in a Junior High School. *Bulletin of Educational Research(教育研究集刊)*, 52(2), 125-153.
- Hsu, Y.-N. (2008). The Relationships among Educational Reform, Local Self-government and School Administration in Taiwan. *Journal of Educational Administration and Evaluation(教育行政與評鑑學刊)*, 5, 55-74.
- Hsueh, H.-H. (1995). *The civil educational reform movement in the late 1980's in Taiwan: An analysis of the relationship between the state and society*. Unpublished master thesis, Taiwan National Normal University, Taipei.
- Hsueh, H. H. (1996). *Education Reform in Taiwan Civil Society: Analysis of State and Society*. Taipei: Vanguard.
- Hu, J.-H. (2005). *1945-1952 years of secondary school education in initial stage after the war of Chen Hua Taiwan*. Unpublished master thesis, National Tsing-Hus University, Hsinchu.
- Huang, C.-C. (1992). The Adequate Method for Class Grouping-An Example in National Taiwan Normal University Junior High School. *Contemporary Education Quarterly(現代教育)*, 7(4), 37-54.
- Huang, D.-Y. (2006). Who are changing their household registration in order to enter other schools?(NSC94-2415-H035-004). National Science Council.
- Huang, D.-Y. (2008). Catchment Area System and School Choice: Who choose schools? Retrieved August 8, 2009, from http://economic.ccu.edu.tw/economic/academic/master_paper/080609seminar.pdf
- Huang, H.-C. (2003, November 8). Magistrate: Students in Cow-Raising Classes can Also be successful. Local Council Discussed the Pros and Cons of the Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy. *United Daily News*, p. B2.
- Huang, J.-T. (1995). The Ideals and the Reality of the Education Reform Policies: A Case Study of the Voluntary Senior High School Entry Program. *Mathmedia(數學傳播)*, 19(1), 3-9.
- Huang, P.-H. (1998). The Reform of Entrance Examination Systems in R.O.C. for the Past Two Decades. *Bulletin of The National Institute of Education Resources and*

- Research(教育資料集刊)*, 23, 241-259.
- Huang, S.-L. (1999). A Study of Subculture of Lower-Ability Track Students. *NCHU Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences(中興大學人文社會學報)*, 8, 313-332.
- Huang, S.-M. (2004). Reproduction: The Change on the Admission Policy of Taiwan's Senior High Schools. *Taiwan Journal of Sociology of Education(台灣教育社會學研究)*, 4(1), 77-111.
- Huang, T.-H. (2002). Reflecting the Problems and Solutions of the Promotion of Taiwanese Educational Reform Considering the 'Cultural Habitus'. *Journal of Education Research(教育研究月刊)*, 101, 27-38.
- Huang, T.-H. (2005). The Encountered Difficulties, Adaptive Activities, and Their Implications for Elementary School Principals in Implementing the New Policy of 9-Year Curriculum Reform. *Bulletin of Educational Entrepreneurship and Management(教育經營與管理研究集刊)*, 1, 51-72.
- Huang, W.-C., Chen, C.-L., & Lin, M.-H. (1991). The Investigation of the Problems of the Grouping Practice in Junior High Schools and the Exploration of the Solutions. The Department of Compulsory Education, Ministry of Education.
- Humanistic Education Foundation. (1997). The Announcement of the Establishment of the 'Mixed-Ability Grouping' Action Group. *Humanistic Educational Journal*, 98, 61.
- Humanistic Education Foundation. (2001a). The 'transformation' of streaming'. *Humanistic Education Journal*, 146, 32-35.
- Humanistic Education Foundation. (2001b). The Educational Regulations and the Educational Practice. *Humanistic Educational Journal*, 148, 20-23.
- Humanistic Education Foundation. (2002). The Disguised Streaming under the Non-Action Governing: the 2002 Survey of the Violation of the Mixed-ability Grouping Policy in Junior High Schools. *Humanistic Educational Journal*, 161, 20-23.
- Humanistic Education Foundation. (2003a). The 2003 Survey of the Within-school Streaming: The Resistance of Reform and The Abnormal Advanced School Entry Competition is Coming Back. *Humanistic Educational Journal*, 173, 37-44.
- Humanistic Education Foundation. (2003b). The Discussion of Mixed-ability Grouping Teaching and Corporal Punishment in Teacher Training Institutions. Unpublished Survey. Humanistic Education Foundation.
- Humanistic Education Foundation. (2008). 2008 Survey of the Junior High School Education. *Humanistic Educational Journal*, 233, 42-60.
- Humanistic Education Foundation. (2009). 2009 Survey of the Junior High School Education: To Fight for Normal Education For Students. Retrieved Feb, 14th, 2010, from <http://hef.yam.org.tw/index01.htm>

- Humes, W., & Tom, B. (2003). Post-Structuralism and policy research in education. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(2), 175-187.
- Hung, M.-C. (1988, August 12). The Never-Stopping Lobbying for Sending Children to the Higher Attaining Classes. Difficult for Administrative Officers to Decline the Requests from Local Councillors. *United Daily News*, p. 9.
- Hwang, K.-K. (1982, October 4). Diagnosing the Junior High School Education Syndrome. *United Daily News*, p. 2.
- Hwang, S.-I. (2001). Lower Achievers in Non-Ability-Grouping Junior-High School Classrooms. *The Journal of Educational Science(教育科學期刊)*, 1(1), 3-17.
- Hwang, T.-m. (2008). *The Education Rush in Taiwan since the late 1940s*. Unpublished Doctoral thesis, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei.
- Hwang, Y.-J. (2002). *Social Stratum, Social Network and the Subjective Recognition: The Continuance of the Unequal Social Stratum System in Taiwan*. Taipei: Chu-Liu(巨流圖書).
- Hwang, Y.-J., & Chen, Y.-G. (2005). The Problem of Entering Advanced Schools in Taiwan: A Sociology of Education Review on Theory and Research. *Taiwan Journal of Sociology of Education(台灣教育社會學研究)*, 5(1), 77-118.
- The Increasing Teenager Problems in the Change of Society. Experts and Scholars Discussed Solutions. (1978, June 21). *United Daily News*, p. 3.
- Ireson, J., & Hallam, S. (1999). Raising Standards: Is Ability Grouping the Answer? *Oxford Review of Education*, 25(3), 343-358.
- Ireson, J., & Hallam, S. (2001). *Ability Grouping in Education*. London: Paul Chapman.
- Ireson, J., Hallam, S., Hack, S., Clark, H., & Plewis, I. (2002). Ability Grouping in English Secondary Schools: Effects on Attainment in English Mathematics and Science. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 8(3), 299-318.
- Ireson, J., Hallam, S., & Hurley, C. (2005). What are the effects of ability grouping on GCSE attainment? *British Educational Research Journal*, 31(4), 443-458.
- Jan, J.-Y. (2000). The Development of the 9-Year Integrated Curriculum Reform. *Journal of Education Research(教育研究月刊)*(80), 1.
- Kan, P.-K. (2006). *The Analysis of Teaching Effects Displayed by Ability-Grouped Class Assignment--Based on Senior High Students' Learning Performances*. Unpublished master thesis, Fo Guang University, Yilan.
- Karlsen, G. E. (2000). Decentralized centralism: framework for a better understanding of governance in the field of education. *Journal of Education Policy*, 15(5), 525-538.
- Katz, E., Levin, M. L., & Hamilton, H. (1963). Traditions of Research on the Diffusion of Innovation. *American Sociological Review*, 28(2), 237-252.
- Kerckhoff, A. C. (1986). Effects of Ability Grouping in British Secondary Schools.

- American Sociological Review*, 51(6), 824-858.
- Kogan, M. (1975). *Educational Policy-Making*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Kogan, M. (1978). *The Politics of Education Change*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Kuan, M.-J. (2007). The Relationship of Educational Conditioning and Test Items--Taking Chinese Test (1954-2001) as an Example *Bulletin of Testing and Assessment*(*考試學刊*), 2, 61-85.
- Kung, W.-C. (1990, July 4). Parent Hunger Stirkes Junior High Schools' Streaming. . *United Daily News*, p. 5.
- Kuo, S.-Y. (1985, Jan 21st). Streaming? Mixed-ability grouping? or Setting? *United Daily News*, p. 2.
- Kuo, Y.-T. (2006). *A Study of the Relationship of the Support of Junior High School Teachers toward Normal Class Grouping with Teachers' Belief and Teachers' Attitude*. Unpublished master thesis, National Cheng Kung University, Tainan.
- Kupfer, A. (2008). Diminished States? National Power in European Education Policy. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 56(3), 286-303.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. London: SAGE.
- Lacey, C. (1970). *Hightown Grammar*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Lai, S.-C. (1990, July 9). Cramming the Higher Attaining Classes while Ignoring the Lower Attaining Classes. Council of Education Seek For Balance. *United Daily News*, p. 4.
- Lan, S.-T. (2003). Textbook Reform Policy in Taiwan: Evolution and Future Trends. *Journal of the National Institute for Compilation and Translation*(*國立編譯館館刊*), 31, 3-11.
- LeCompte, M. D., & Preissle, J. (1993). *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research*. California Academic Press.
- Lee, F.-J. (2003). Teachers as Agents to Perform Justice-based Educational Reform. *Taiwan Journal of Sociology of Education*(*台灣教育社會學研究*), 3(2), 113-150.
- Lee, T.-C. (1993). The Development of the Junior High School Graduates Voluntarily Senior High School Entry Program. *Humanistic Education Foundation*, 50, 40-49.
- Lee, T.-C., & Chen, Y.-K. (1994). The Recent Forty-Year Development of Taiwanese Education(5). *Humanistic Educational Journal*, 55, 46-53.
- Legislative Yuan. (1997). Inviting Minister of Education Wu, Jin to report the policy and being questioned (Publication. Retrieved 2010, January 27, from Legislative Yuan Bulletin System:
http://twinfo.ncl.edu.tw/tiqry/hypage.cgi?HYPAGE=search/search_res.hpg&dtd_id=12&g=&sysid=D9709470&sflag=2

- A Letter to the Minister of Education Wu Jin. Higher Attaining Pupils Are Crammed with Tests and Severely Corporal Punished. Obtaining High Scores Becomes the Only Standard. Don't Know Whether Teachers Have Any Educational Ideology. . (1997, July 16). *United Daily News*, p. 3.
- Li, C.-H. (2002, September 28). Higher Attaining Pupils Transfer to Other Schools When Schools Using Mixed-ability Grouping. Directors in Local Educational Authority Confessed Violating the Regulation. *United Daily News*, p. 18.
- Li, C.-M. (2007). *A study of parental choice: the case in Wen-Shan District, Taipei City*. Unpublished master thesis, National Hualien University of Education, Hualien.
- Lin, C.-C. (1998). *The New Sociology of Education :A Research on the Relationship between Our Society and Education* Taipei: Wu-Nan Culture Enterprise.
- Lin, C.-C. (2007). The process of an educational policy: a case study of the process of enforcing the mixed-ability grouping policy through law. *School Administration(學校行政雙月刊)*, 49, 228-253.
- Lin, H.-M. (2004). An exploration of the problems of the mixed-ability grouping policy: a policy analysis perspective. *School Administration(學校行政雙月刊)*, 34, 165-183.
- Lin, M.-D. (1998). Issues Should be Considered when Implementing Educational Policies: Implications from the Findings of Organizational Studies. *Educational Policy Forum(教育政策論壇)*, 1(1), 24-37.
- Lin, N.-P. (1986, October 13). The Superficial Conformity, the Old Habit of Current Education *United Daily News*, p. 6.
- Lin, S.-Y. (1995). *A Study of Assessing the Relationships between Face Values, Ambition for a higher education and Teaching problems*. Unpublished master thesis, National ChengChi University, Taipei.
- Lin, T.-S. (2002). The Effect of Academic/Vocational Public/Private Tracking in Status Attainment. *Journal of Education & Psychology(教育與心理研究)*, 25, 35-62
- Lin, W.-I. (2005). *The Relationship between Taiwan's Political Change and Educational Policy: A hegemonic perspective*. Unpublished master thesis, National Sun-Yat-sen University, Kaohsiung.
- Lin, W.-Y. (1996). The Analysis of the Administrative Measures of Compulsory Education. Executive Yuan Education Reform Committee.
- Lin, W.-Y., & Wang, C.-W. (1996a). The Analysis of the Social Effects of Educational Tracking. Executive Yuan Education Reform Committee.
- Lin, W.-Y., & Wang, C.-W. (1996b). The Control, Regulation or Distortion of Taiwanese Education: An Integrated Research of the Principle of Deregulation. Executive Yuan Education Reform Committee.
- Lin, Y.-H. (1980). Report of the result of utilising streaming. In T. M. o. E. Department of

- Compulsory Education (Ed.), *The research summary of the junior high school counselling task* (pp. 18-19). Taipei: Department of Compulsory Education, The Ministry of Education.
- Lin, Y.-T. (1987). *The Education in Taiwan, 40 years*. Taipei: ZihLi Night Paper.
- Lingard, B. (1996). Educational policy making in a postmodern state. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 23(1), 65-91.
- Lingard, B., & Garrick, B. (1997). Producing and Practising Social Justice Policy in Education: a policy trajectory study from Queensland, Australia. *International Studies in Sociology and Education*, 7(2), 157-178.
- Lingard, B., & Ozga, J. (Eds.). (2007). *The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Education Policy and Politics*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Liu, H.-F. (2007). *History, Structure and Education: An Exploration of the Evolution of Vocation Education*. Taipei: Great Scholar Publishing.
- Liu, S.-F. (2004). *The Teaching Difficulty and Teaching Strategies of Mixed-Ability Class in Junior High Schools-Interviewing 8 Honoured Teachers*. Unpublished master thesis, National ChengChi University, Taipei.
- Liu, S.-M. (2005). *Social Change and Educational Policy*. Taipei: Psychological Publishing.
- Lo, H.-L. (2002, September 28). Hsin-Chu County being Pointed Out Violating the Mixed-ability Grouping Policy *United Daily News*, p. 18.
- Lo, H.-L., Hsu, J.-Y., Tsai, T.-M., Chen, Y.-S., & Chen, C.-H. (2005, April 13). Experimental Classes = Music Talent Classes = PE Talent Classes = Streamed Classes. *United Daily News*, p. C8.
- Lo, Y.-H. (2000). *Policy Evolution of Class Size Reduction, Normalised Class Assignment in Junior High School and English Teaching in Elementary School-From the Education Minister of Wei-Fan Kuo, Jin Wu to Chin-Chiang Lin*. Unpublished master thesis, Taipei Municipal University of Education, Taipei.
- Lookwood, A. T. (1996). *Tracking: Conflicts and Resolutions*. Thousand, CA: Corwin Press.
- Loveless, T. (1999). *The Tracking Wars: State Reform Meets School Policy*. Washington, D.C: The Brookings Institution.
- Lowe, J. (2000). International Examinations: the new credentialism and reproduction of advantage in a globalising world. *Assessment in Education*, 7(3), 363-377.
- Lowi, T. J. (1972). Four Systems of Policy, Politics and Choice. *Public Administration Review*, 32(4), 298-310.
- Lu, C.-F. (1994). An Example of Taiwanese Educational Reform: The Ideal and the Implementation of the Junior High Graduates Voluntarily Senior High School Entry Program. *Taiwan Education Review*(台灣教育), 520, 16-20.
- Lu, C.-F. (1997). The Problems and Management of a Senior High Vocational School Entry

- System without an Entry Examination. *Technological and Vocational Education Bimonthly*(*技術及職業教育*), 37, 8-10.
- Lu, C.-F., & Huang, S.-J. (1995). The Idea of Entering Senior High Level Education without the Entry Examination. *Educational Research & Information*(*教育研究資訊*), 3(1), 10-15.
- Lu, L.-Y. (2002). From Manpower Planning to Senior High Education: The Evolution of Taiwanese Vocational Education. *Humanistic Educational Journal*, 160, 21-25.
- Lu, L.-Y. (2004). Expose the Lies Through Real Action: How HEF Overlooks the Practice of the Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy. *Humanistic Educational Journal*, 185, 16-21.
- Lu, L.-Y. (2009). *Behind the battles between streaming and mixed-ability grouping: the market mechanism in Taiwan*. Paper presented at the 2009 British Educational Research Association Annual Conference.
- Lu, S.-H. (2005). The Observation Report of the First Year after the Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy has been Enforced through Law. *The 2005 Report of the Humanistic Education Foundation* Retrieved August 12, 2006, from <http://hef.yam.org.tw/abouthef/04/2005/06.htm>
- Lucas, S. R. (1999). *Tracking Inequality: Stratification and Mobility in American High Schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Lunn, B. (1970). *Streaming in the Primary School*. Slough: NFER.
- Lyau, N.-M. (2003). A Comparative Analysis of the Opportunity for Academic/Vocational High School Students to Entering an Advanced School in the last 20 years. *Journal of Education Research*(*教育研究*), 109, 49-56
- Lyau, N.-M., & Liu, M.-S. (2004). A Comparative Analysis of the Input of Educational Resources in Taiwan's Academic and Vocational Education *Educational Policy Forum*(*教育政策論壇*) , 7(1), 41-58.
- Lynch, K. (2000). Research and Theory on Equality and Education. In M. T. Hallinan (Ed.), *Handbook of the Sociology of Education* (pp. 85-105). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- Ma, H.-C. (2001). *The Research of the Senior High School Entry System in Taiwan*. Unpublished master thesis, National Kaohsiung Normal University, Kaohsiung.
- Ma, H.-C. (2005). An exploration of the current mixed-ability grouping policy and its implementation. *School Administration*(*學校行政雙月刊*), 39, 193-200.
- Ma, H.-C. (2007). *A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Senior Secondary Education Admission System Reform in Post-1990 Taiwan*. Unpublished Doctoral thesis, National Kaohsiung Normal University, Kaohsiung.
- Maguire, M., & Ball, S. J. (1994). Researching Politics and the Politics of Research: recent

- qualitative studies in the UK. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 7(3), 269-286.
- Malen, B. (2001). Generating Interest in Interest Groups. *Educational Policy*, 15(1), 168-186.
- Malen, B. (2003). Tightening their grip? The Impact of State Activism on Local School Systems. *Educational Policy*, 17(2), 195-216.
- Malen, B. (2006). Revisiting Policy Implementation as a Political Phenomenon: The Case of Reconstitution Policies. In M. I. Honig (Ed.), *New Directions in Education Policy Implementation: Confronting Complexity* (pp. 83-104). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Malen, B., & Knapp, M. (1997). Rethinking the multiple perspectives approach to education policy analysis: implications for policy-practice connections *Journal of Education Policy*, 12(5), 419-445.
- Mao, C.-J. (2001). An Analysis of Curriculum Reforms in Taiwan from the Perspective of Political Sociology. *Taiwan Journal of Sociology of Education*(台灣教育社會學研究), 1(1), 79-101.
- Mao, C.-J. (2004). From Neo-Marxism to Post-structuralism: Reconceptualizing Sociological Studies of Curriculum. *Bulletin of Educational Research*(教育研究集刊), 50(1), 119-142.
- Mao, C.-J., & Chang, C.-C. (2005). Between the Local and the Global: The Shifting Discourses of Curriculum Reform after the Post-Martial Era of Taiwan. *Taiwan Journal of Sociology of Education*(台灣教育社會學研究), 5(1), 39-76.
- Martial Law. (1948).
- Marvasti, A. (2004). *Qualitative Research in Sociology*. London SAGE.
- Mawhinney, H. B. (2001). Theoretical Approaches to Understanding Interest Groups. *Educational Policy*, 15(1), 187-214.
- McCulloch, G. (2004). *Documentary Research: Education, History and the Social Sciences*. London & New York: Routledge.
- McDonnell, L., & Elmore, R. (1987). Getting the job done: Alternative policy instruments. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 9(2), 133-152.
- McGinn, N., & Street, S. (1986). Educational Decentralization: Weak State or Strong State? *Comparative Education Review*, 30(4), 471-490.
- McLaughin, M. W. (1976). Implementation as mutual adaptation: change in classroom organization. *Teachers College Record*, 77(3), 339-351.
- McLaughin, M. W. (1987). Learning from Experience: Lessons From Policy Implementation. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 9(2), 171-178.
- McLaughin, M. W., & Mitra, D. (2001). Theory-Based Change and Change-based Theory:

- Going Deeper, Going Broader. *Journal of Educational Change*, 2(4), 301-323.
- McLaughlin, M. (2006). Implementation Research in Education: Lessons Learned, Lingering Questions and New opportunities. In M. I. Honig (Ed.), *New Directions in Education Policy Implementation: Confronting Complexity* (pp. 209-228). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- McLaughlin, M. W. (1990). The Rand Change Agent Study Revisited: Macro Perspectives and Micro Realities. *Educational Researcher*, 19(9), 11-16.
- McLaughlin, M. W. (1998). Listening and Learning from the Field: Tales of Policy Implementation and Situated Practice. In *International Handbook of Educational Change* (pp. 70-84): Kluwer Academic.
- McLaughlin, M. W. (2008). Beyond 'Misery research' - new opportunities for implementation research, policy and practice. In C. Sugrue (Ed.), *The Future of Educational Change* (pp. 175-190). Oxon: Routledge.
- McPherson, A., & Raab, C. D. (1988). *Governing education: a sociology of policy since 1945*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Meng, H.-C. (2003, October 23). The Ministry of Education Mandate Lottery in Assign Students into Mixed-ability Classes. *United Daily News*, p. B8.
- Meng, H.-C. (2004, April 16). Enforcing the Mixed-ability Grouping Policy through Law. Violation Faces Severe Consequences. *United Daily News*, p. A1.
- Miao-Li County Starts Petition for Using Streaming in Schools. (2003, December 2). *United Daily News*, p. B8.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Ministry of Education. (1979). The Announcement of the Pilot 'Execution Codes of Grouping Practice for Junior High School Pupils'. *Ministry of Education Bulletin*, 56, 4-5.
- Ministry of Education. (1982). Announcing the 'The Execution Codes of Grouping Practice for Junior High School Pupils'. *Ministry of Education Bulletin*, 91, 17-18.
- Ministry of Education. (1988). Minister proposed to overhaul the grouping practice, curriculum framework and textbook content in junior high school *Ministry of Education Bulletin*, 159, 15.
- Ministry of Education. (1991). Establishing the 'Junior High School Education Problems Research Group' to Deal with Current Problems. *Ministry of Education Bulletin*, 196, 43-44.
- Ministry of Education. (1993). The final report of the junior high school graduates voluntarily senior high school entry program consultation committee. Ministry of Education.

- Ministry of Education. (1997a). Announcing the Reporting Network for the Practice of the Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy in Junior High Schools. *Ministry of Education Bulletin*, 273, 43.
- Ministry of Education. (1997b). Private Schools that Violate the Mixed-ability Grouping Policy will Face Sanctions. *Ministry of Education Bulletin*, 274, 36.
- Ministry of Education. (1997c). Announcing the reward lists for junior high school that implement the mixed-ability grouping Policy well. *Ministry of Education Bulletin*, 276, 32-33.
- Ministry of Education. (1998). The Ministry Discussed the Mixed-ability Grouping Policy With Parents. *Ministry of Education Bulletin*, 277, 33.
- Ministry of Education. (1998b). The Integrated Evaluation Report of the Junior High School Graduates Voluntarily Entering Senior High School Program. *Ministry of Education Bulletin*, 277, 33-36.
- Ministry of Education. (2003a). The Ministry of Education has Started the Inspection of the Practice of the Mixed-ability Grouping Policy and to Form an Implementation Plan. *Ministry of Education Bulletin*, 347, 38-40.
- Ministry of Education. (2003b). The Ministry of Education Enhancing the Implementation of the Mixed-Ability Grouping Policy Executive Plan. Ministry of Education.
- Ministry of Education. (2004). The Revision of the Senior High School and Senior High Vocational School Multi-phase Entry Program. *Ministry of Education Bulletin*, 357, 25-28.
- Ministry of Education. (2010). *Primary Statistics*. Retrieved from http://www.edu.tw/statistics/content.aspx?site_content_sn=8869.
- Moore, R. (2004). *Education and Society: Issues and Explanations in the Sociology of Education*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Mosen-Lowe, L. A. J., Vidovich, L., & Chapman, A. (2009). Students 'at-risk' policy: competing social and economic discourses. *Journal of Education Policy*, 24(4), 461-476.
- National Teachers' Association. (2006). The Distorted Gifted Class. Retrieved February, 22, 2010, from <http://www.maillist.com.tw/maillist/file/ntamail/20060518113116.html>
- Nine-year Compulsory Education Statute. (1968).
- Oakes, J. (1985). *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Oakes, J. (1992). Can Tracking Research Inform Practice? Technical, Normative, and Political Considerations. *Educational Researcher*, 21(4), 12-21.
- Oakes, J. (1995). Two Cities' Tracking and Within-school Segregation. *Teachers College*

- Record*, 96(4), 681-690.
- Oakes, J., & Wells, A. S. (1998). Detracking for High Student Achievement. *Educational Leadership*, 55(6), 38-41.
- Oakes, J., Wells, A. S., Jones, M., & Datnow, A. (1997). Detracking: The Social Construction of Ability, Cultural Politics, and Resistance to Reform. *Teachers College Record*, 98(3), 482-510.
- Olsen, B., & Sexton, D. (2009). Threat Rigidity, School Reform, and How Teachers View Their Work Inside Current Education Policy Contexts. *American Educational Research Journal*, 46(1), 9-44.
- Osei, G. M., & Brock, C. (2006). Decentralisation in education, institutional culture and teachers autonomy in Ghana. *Journal of Education Policy*, 21(4), 437-458.
- Ouyang, S. (1990). A Political Analysis of Taiwan's Political Transition. *Politics Review(Taiwan University)*, 1, 127-145.
- Ou, Y.-S. (1998). School and Curriculum Reform in the 21st Century-Prospects of Educational Reform in Taiwan. *Elementary Education(國民教育)*, 38(3), 2-9.
- Ozga, J. (1990). Policy Research and Policy Theory: a comment on Fitz and Halpin. *Journal of Education Policy*, 5(4), 359-362.
- Ozga, J. (2000). *Policy Research in Educational Settings: contested terrain*. Buckingham: Open University.
- Ozga, J., & Lingard, B. (2007). Globalisation, education policy and politics. In B. Lingard & J. Ozga (Eds.), *The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Education Policy and Politics* (pp. 65-82). Oxon: Routledge.
- Pallas, A. M., Entwisle, D. R., Alexander, K. L., & Stluka, M. F. (1994). Ability-Group Effects: Instructional, Social, or Institutional? *Sociology of Education*, 67(1), 27-46.
- Pan, W.-C. (1999). Enrich and Equalise the Junior High School Level Education. *Secondary Education (中等教育)*, 50(1), 54-64.
- Phillips, D. C., & Burbules, N. C. (2000). *Post positivism and Educational Research*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Phillips, R. (2003). Education policy, comprehensive schooling and devolution in the disUnited Kingdom: an historical 'home international' analysis. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(1), 1-17.
- Popkewitz, T. S. (1991). *A Political Sociology of Educational Reform*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Popkewitz, T. S. (2000). Rethinking Decentralization and the State/Civil Society Distinctions: The State as a Problematic of Governing In T. S. Popkewitz (Ed.), *Educational Knowledge :changing relationships between the state, civil society, and the educaitonal community*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

- Popkewitz, T. S., & Brennan, M. (1998). Restructuring of Social and Political Theory in Education: Foucault and Social Epistemology of School Practices. In T. S. Popkewitz & M. Brennan (Eds.), *Foucault's Challenge: Discourse, Knowledge, and Power in Education* (pp. 3-35). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Power, S. (1992). Researching the impact of education policy: difficulties and discontinuities. *Journal of Education Policy*, 7(2), 493-500.
- Power, S. (1994). Review of Bowe, Ball and Gold 'Reforming Education and Changing Schools' *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 26(5), 569-571.
- Power, S., & Whitty, G. (1999). New Labour's education policy: first, second or third way? *Journal of Education Policy*, 14(5), 535-546.
- Power, S., Whitty, G., Gewirtz, S., Halpin, D., & Dickson, M. (2004). Paving a 'third way'? A policy trajectory analysis of education action zones. *Research Papers in Education*, 19(4), 453-475.
- Prawat, R. S. (1992). Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching and Learning: A Constructivist Perspective. *American Journal of Education*, 100(3), 354-395.
- Priestley, M. (2005). Making the most of the curriculum review: some reflections on supporting and sustaining change schools. *Scottish Educational Review*, 37(1), 29-38.
- Raab, C. (1992). Taking networks seriously: Education policy in Britain. *European Journal of Political Research*, 21(1-2), 69-90.
- Raab, C. (1994). Theorising the Governance of Education. *British Journal of Educational Studies* 42(1), 6-22.
- Radnor, H., Koshy, V., & Taylor, A. (2007). Gifts, talents and meritocracy. *Journal of Education Policy*, 22(3), 283-299.
- Raffe, D. (1985). Education and training initiatives for 14-18s: content and context. In A. G. Watts (Ed.), *Education & Training 14-18: Policy and Practice* (pp. 19-25). Cambridge: CRAC.
- Raffe, D. (1987). The context of the Youth Training Scheme: an analysis of its strategy and development. *Journal of Education and Work*, 1(1), 1-31.
- Raffe, D., Howieson, C., & Tinklin, T. (2002). The Scottish educational crisis of 2000: an analysis of the policy process of unification. *Journal of Education Policy*, 17(2), 167-185.
- Raffe, D., & Spours, K. (Eds.). (2007). *Policy-making and Policy Learning in 14-19 Education*. London: Institution of Education, University of London.
- Ranson, S. (1995). Theorising Education Policy. *Journal of Education Policy*, 10(4), 427-448.
- Raveaud, M. (2005). Hares, tortoises and the social construction of the pupil: differentiated

- learning in French and English primary schools. *British Educational Research Journal*, 31(4), 459-479.
- The Reactions to the New Grouping Practice Regulations. (1985, April 16). *United Daily News*, p. 6.
- Reay, D. (1998). Setting the agenda: the growing impact of market forces on pupil grouping in British secondary schooling. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 30(5), 545-558.
- Reay, D. (2006). 'I'm not seen as one of the clever children': consulting primary school pupils about the social conditions of learning. *Educational Review*, 58(2), 171-181.
- Reay, D., & Willian, D. (1999). 'I'll be a nothing': structure, agency and the construction of identity through assessment. *British Educational Research Journal*, 25(3), 343-354.
- Reid, M. I., Clunies-Ross, L. R., Goacher, B., & Vile, C. (1981). *Mixed-Ability Teaching: Problems and Possibilities*. Windsor: NFER-Nelson.
- Rose, G. (2007). The role of principal empowerment within a site-based management environment: empirical testing of a structural model. *Journal of Educational Change*, 8(3), 207-233.
- Rosenbaum. (1976). *Making Inequality: The Hidden Curriculum of High School Tracking*. New York: Wiley.
- Rosenholtz, S. J., & Rosenholtz, S. H. (1981). Classroom Organization and the Perception of Ability. *Sociology of Education*, 54(2), 132-140.
- Rosenholtz, S. J., & Simpson, C. (1984). The formation of ability conceptions: Developmental trend or social construction? *Review of Educational Research*, 54, 31-63.
- Rosenholtz, S. J., & Wilson, B. (1980). The Effect of Classroom Structure on Shared Perceptions of Ability. *American Educational Research Journal*, 17(1), 75-82.
- Rowan, B. (2008). Does the school improvement "industry"(organizations providing schools and governing agencies with information, training, materials, and programmatic resources relevant to instructional improvement problems) Help or prevent deep and sound change? *Journal of Educational Change*(9), 197-202.
- Sabatier, P. A. (1991). Toward Better Theories of the Policy Process. *Political Science and Politics*, 24(2), 147-156.
- Sabatier, P. A., & Mazmanian, D. A. (1980). The Implementation of Public Policy: A Framework of Analysis. *Policy Studies Journal*, 8(4), 538-560.
- Schneider, A., & Ingram, H. (1990). Behavioural Assumptions of Policy Tools. *The Journal of Politics*, 52(2), 510-529.
- Schwandt, T. A. (1997). *Qualitative Inquiry: A Dictionary of Terms*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Schwartz, F. (1981). Supporting or Subverting Learning: Peer Group Patterns in Four

- Tracked Schools. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 12(2), 99-121.
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Setting Confused the Administration Work in Junior High Schools. Principals Complained. (1985, September 7). *United Daily News*, p.7.
- Shang, L.-Y. (1980). The adaptation problems in a streamed system in junior high schools. In T. M. o. E. Department of Compulsory Education (Ed.), *The research summary of the junior high school counselling task* (pp. 10-13). Taipei: Department of Compulsory Education, The Ministry of Education.
- Shen, C.-C. (1997, June 3). The Principals in Yunlin County Oppose Mixed-Ability Grouping. *United Daily News*, p. 19.
- Shen, H.-Y. (2006, October 25). The New Criterion for Assess Gifted Students is Applied in Primary and Junior High Schools. *Liberty Times*, from <http://www.libertytimes.com.tw/2006/new/oct/25/today-life9.htm>
- Shen, S.-S. (2005). The Study on Nine-year Integrated Curriculum of Taiwan: From the Perspectives of Social Context and International Development. *Educational Resources and Research*(教育資料與研究), 65, 17-34.
- Shen, T.-y. (2003). The Change of Senior High School Admission System in Taiwan. *Secondary Education* (中等教育), 54(1), 144-157.
- Shih, C.-Y. (2005). *A Study of Ability-Grouping Practice in Junior High English class*. Unpublished master thesis, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei.
- Shih, M.-H. (1985a, September 7). The Distorted Junior High School Education Under "Sheng-Hsueh-Chu-Yi". Grouping Practice Does Not Matter. *United Daily News*, p. 7.
- Shih, M.-H. (1985b, March 8). Some Agreed but Some Worried about Using Setting in the Second Grade of Junior High Schools. *United Daily News*, p. 6.
- Shih, Y. (1998). *Classroom Management and the Methods of Mixed-ability Teaching*. Taipei: Humanistic Education Foundation.
- Silverman, D. (2005). *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook* (2nd ed.). London: SAGE.
- Silverman, D. (2006). *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and Interaction* (3rd ed.). London: SAGE.
- Sipple, J. W., & Kileen, K. M. (2004). Context, Capacity, and Concern: A District-Level Analysis of the Implementation of Standards-Based Reform in New York State. *Educational Policy*, 18(3), 456-290.
- Sipple, J. W., Kileen, K. M., & Monk, D. H. (2004). Adoption and Adaptation: School District Responses to State Imposed Learning and Graduation Requirements.

- Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 26(2), 143-168.
- Slavin, R. E. (1987). Ability Grouping and Student Achievement in Elementary Schools: A Best-Evidence Synthesis. *Review of Educational Research*, 57(3), 293-336.
- Slavin, R. E. (1990). Student Achievement Effects of Ability Grouping in Secondary Schools: A Best-Evidence Synthesis. *Review of Educational Research*, 60(3), 471-499.
- Smith, C. M. M., & Sutherland, M. J. (2003). Setting or mixed-ability? Teachers' views of the organisation of pupils for learning. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 3(3), 141-146.
- Sorensen, A. B. (1970). Organizational Differentiation of Students and Educational Opportunity. *Sociology of Education*, 43(4), 355-376.
- Spours, K., Young, M. D., Howieson, C., & Raffe, D. (2000). Unifying academic and vocational learning in England, Wales and Scotland. In F. Coffield (Ed.), *Differing visions of a learning society: research findings Volume 1*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The Art of Case Study Research*. London: SAGE.
- Straková, J. (2007). The Impact of the Structure of the Education System on the Development of Educational Inequalities in the Czech Republic. *Czech Sociological Review*, 43(4), 589-601.
- Streaming used in junior high schools affects pupils' mental development. Yang Kuo-Shu pointed out one cause of increasing teenager problems. (1976, August 16). *United Daily News*, p. 2.
- Su, C.-f. (2003). The Current Compulsory Education Curriculum Reform Policies. *Inservice Education Bulletin*(*研習資訊*), 20(2), 69-76.
- Su, C.-f. (2006). The "One Guide-Multiple Text" Policy in the Nine Year Curriculum: Problems and Resolutions. *Journal of Educational Research and Development*(*教育研究與發展期刊*), 2(3), 63-91.
- Sugrue, C. (Ed.). (2008). *The Future of Educational Change*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Sukhnandan, L., & Lee, B. (1998). *Streaming, Setting and Grouping by Ability*. Slough: NFER.
- Sun, J.-H., & Lin, C.-Y. (2005, October 7). The Number of Gifted Class Increases. Are There More Clever Children today? *United Daily News*, p. C7.
- Support Setting by Administrators in Junior High Schools. But Still Hope for More Space. (1985, January 22). *United Daily News*, p. 2.
- Swann, J., & Brown, S. (1997). The Implementation of a national curriculum and teachers' classroom thinking. *Research Papers in Education*, 12(1), 91-114.
- Taipei City Council. (1984). The Questioning on the Taipei City Educational Authority. *Taipei City Council Bulletin*, 29(21), 1567-1571.

- Taiwan Provincial Council of Education. (1983). The FAQ about the Grouping Practice in Junior High Schools. *Taiwan Provincial Council of Education Bulletin* 51(17), 2011-2015.
- Taiwanese Professors Association. (1993). The Exposition of the Establishment of the Educational Fundamental Act. Retrieved Jan, 11st, 2010, from <http://taup.yam.org.tw/new410/tplw0003.html>
- Tan, C., & Ng, P. T. (2007). Dynamics of change: decentralised centralism of education in Singapore. *Journal of Educational Change*, 8(2), 155-168.
- Tang, C.-M. (2003). Self-Criticism and Improvement on Senior High Schools' Multiple Entrance Programs. *Theory and Policy*(理論與政策), 16(4), 89-107.
- Tauyuan County Teachers Association. (2006). The Joint Examination for Entering Gifted Classes. Let's Hear What Experts Say. *Tauyuan Educational Newsletter* Retrieved December 12, 2009, from <http://www.tyt.org.tw/Email/showrd.asp?id=288>
- Tauyuan County Teachers Association. (2008). Can we follow the law next year? The backdoor story of the practice mixed-ability grouping policy in Tauyuan county. *Tauyuan Education Newsletter* Retrieved December 12, 2009, from <http://www.tyt.org.tw/Email/showrd.asp?id=986>
- Taylor, S. (2004). Researching educational policy and change in 'new times': using critical discourse analysis. *Journal of Education Policy*, 19(4), 433-447.
- Taylor, S., Rizvi, F., Lingard, B., & Henry, M. (1997). *Educational Policy and the Politics of Change*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Teelken, C. (2000). Market Forces in Education, A Comparative Perspective in England and Scotland. *Scottish Educational Review*, 32(1), 21-32.
- Temporary act of the period of mobilization for the suppression of Communist rebellion(動員戡亂時期臨時條款). (1949).
- The Educational Research Committee, M. o. E. (1992). *The Briefing of the Junior High School Graduates Voluntarily Senior High School Entry Program*. Taipei, Taiwan: Ministry of Education.
- The Executive Yuan Council For Economic Planning and Development. (1973a). The Fourth Phase of Human Power Development Plan. The Executive Yuan Council For Economic Planning and Development.
- The Executive Yuan Council For Economic Planning and Development. (1973b). The Sixth Phase of the Four-Year Economic Planning and Development Plan. The Executive Yuan Council For Economic Planning and Development.
- Thomson, P. (2005). Bringing Bourdieu to policy sociology: codification, misrecognition and exchange value in the UK Context. *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(6),

741-758.

- Timperley, H. S., & Parr, J. M. (2005). Theory competition and the process of change. *Journal of Educational Change*, 6(3), 227-251.
- To Produce Higher High School Entry Rate School Use Several Strategies. Cheat on Inspectors and Using Two Sets of Student Assignments are Usual. (2004, April 16). *United Daily News*, p. A2.
- Troyna, B. (1994). Critical Social Research and Education Policy. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 42(1, Special Edition: Education Policy Studies), 70-82.
- Tsai, C.-t. (2002). Chinese-ization and the Nationalistic Curriculum Reform in Taiwan. *Journal of Education Policy*, 17(2), 229-243.
- Tsai, C.-t. (2005). The Past and the Future of the 9-Year Integrated Curriculum Reform in Primary and Junior High School Level Education. *Inservice Education Bulletin* (研習資訊), 22(4), 39-46.
- Tsai, P.-F. (2008). *Pupils' Perceptions of School Curriculum under the Atmosphere of the Senior High School Entry Competition*. Unpublished master thesis, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei.
- Tsao, J.-T., & Liang, C.-M. (2002). A Study of the Teacher Education System in Taiwan. *Journal of National Taitung Teachers College* (臺東師院學報), 13, 211-240.
- Van Houtte, M. (2006). School type and academic culture: evidence for the differentiation-polarization theory. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38(3), 273-292.
- Vanderstraeten, R. (2006). The Historical Triangulation of Education, Politics and Economy. *Sociology*, 40(1), 125-142.
- Venkatakrishnan, H., & William, D. (2003). Tracking and Mixed-ability Grouping in Secondary School Mathematics Classrooms: a case study 1. *British Educational Research Journal*, 29(2), 189-204.
- Vidovich, L. (2001). *A Conceptual Framework for Analysis of Education Policy and Practices*. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education.
- Vidovich, L. (2003). Methodological framings for a policy trajectory. In T. O'Donoghue & K. Punch (Eds.), *Qualitative Educational Research in Action: Doing and Reflecting*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Vincent, C., & Martin, J. (2000). School-based parents' groups - a politics of voices and representation? *Journal of Education Policy*, 15(5), 459-480.
- Walsh, P. (2006). Narrowed horizons and the impoverishment of educational discourse: teaching, learning and performing under the new educational bureaucracies. *Journal of Education Policy*, 21(1), 95-117.
- Wang, C.-C. (2004, June 11). Principals had Different Opinions towards Using Mixed-ability Grouping in the First Grad of Junior High School. *United Daily News*,

p. B1.

- Wang, C.-C. (2005). *The Civil Education and the Characteristics of Citizens in Taiwan*. Taipei: Taiwan Classics.
- Wang, C.-C. (2006, December 28). Parents Opposed Gifted Students being Placed in Mixed-ability Classrooms. *United Daily News*, p. C1.
- Wang, C.-C. (2007, September 8). The Authority Says: Mixed-ability Grouping. The Local Says: Strategic S-Shape Grouping. *United Daily News*, p. C1.
- Wang, C.-T. (1995). Joint Examination System and 'Sheng-Hsuen-Chu-Yi'(升學主義) *Educational Reform News (教改通訊)*, 10, 36-37.
- Wang, C.-W. (1995). Exploring Educational Tracking through Examining the Joint Advanced School Entry Examination: Final Report. In *Educational Reform Forum Discussion Topic 2: Exploring the Tracked Education through Examining the Joint Advanced School Entry Examination*. Taipei: Executive Yuan Education Reform Committee.
- Wang, C.-W., Lin, H.-Y., & Huang, H.-T. (1996). The Characteristic of Taiwanese Education System: An Analysis of the System of Compulsory Education. Executive Yuan Education Reform Committee.
- Wang, C.-W., & Lin, W.-Y. (1996). *Taiwan's Experience of Educational Reform: An Analysis of the Compulsory Education Policies and Administration measures*. Taipei: YehChiang Publishing(業強).
- Wang, C.-W., & Lin, W.-Y. (1999). *Examining Education Reform in a Different Light*. Taipei: KueiKuan Publishing(桂冠圖書).
- Wang, C.-W., & Ling, W.-Y. (1994). The Advanced School Entry System and the Advanced School Entry Syndrome. In Y.-J. Yang & C. Lin (Eds.), *The Education Reform in Taiwan*. Taipei: Vanguard.
- Wang, L.-y. (1999). Analyzing the Role of the State in the Process of Higher Educational Expansion in Taiwan. *Journal of National Chung Cheng University(國立中正大學學報)*, 10(1), 1-37.
- Wang, R.-J., Chin, M.-C., Cheng, H.-H., & Liu, S.-M. (2003). Rebuild an Educational Administration System with Professional Autonomy and Accountability. In N. T. N. University (Ed.), *The New Direction of Educational Development: Prescribe for the Education Reform*. Taipei: The Psychological Publishing.
- Wang, S.-M. (2006). The Credentialism Shown between the Streaming and Mixed-Ability Grouping: the Myths of the Gifted Classes Joint Examination. *NPF Commentary(國政評論)* Retrieved Jan, 22, 2010, from <http://www.npf.org.tw/post/1/2088>
- Weatherly, R., & Lipsky, M. (1977). Street-level bureaucrats and institutional innovation: implementing special education reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 47(2),

- Wellington, J. (2006). *Educational Research: Contemporary Issues and Practical Approaches* (First South Asian Edition ed.). London & New York: Continuum.
- Wells, A. S., Hirshberg, D., Lipton, M., & Oakes, J. (1995). Bounding the Case within Its Context: A Constructivist Approach to Studying Detracking Reform. *Educational Researcher*, 24(5), 18-24.
- Wells, A. S., & Oakes, J. (1996). Potential Pitfalls of Systemic Reform: Early Lessons from Research on Detracking. *Sociology of Education*(69(Extra issue)), 135-143.
- Wells, A. S., & Oakes, J. (1998). Tracking, Detracking, and the Politics of Educational Reform: A Sociological Perspective. In C. A. Torres & T. R. Mitchell (Eds.), *Sociology of Education: Emerging Perspectives* (pp. 155-180). Albany: State University of New York.
- Wells, A. S., & Serna, I. (1996). The Politics of Culture: Understanding Local Political Resistance to Detracking in Racially Mixed Schools *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1), 93-118.
- Weng, C.-H. (2003, December 9). Local Councillors Propose Voting for Grouping Practice in Schools. *United Daily News*, p. B2.
- Weng, F.-Y. (1996). *The Reform of Secondary Education Policy in Taiwan*. Unpublished Doctor of Philosophy thesis, University of Sheffield, Sheffield.
- Weng, F.-Y. (2001). Decentralization in Educational Governance in Taiwan. *Education and Society*, 19(3), 37-57.
- Weng, F.-Y. (2003). Decentralization in Educational Governance in Taiwan,. In K.-H. Mok (Ed.), *Centralization and Decentralization: Educational Reforms and Changing Governance in Chinese Societies* (pp. 39-58). Hong-Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong.
- Whang, N.-Y. (Ed.). (2006). *Educational Policy Science & Practice*. Taipei: Psychological Publishing.
- Whitty, G. (1985). *Sociology and School Knowledge: Curriculum theory, research and politics*. London: Methuen.
- Whitty, G. (1989). The New Right and the national curriculum: State control or market forces? *Journal of Education Policy*, 4(4), 329-341.
- Whitty, G. (2001). Education, social class and social exclusion. *Journal of Education Policy*, 16(4), 287-295.
- Whitty, G. (2002). *Making Sense of Education Policy* London: Paul Chapman.
- Whitty, G., Gewirtz, S., & Edwards, T. (2000). New Schools for New Times? Notes toward a Sociology of Recent Education Reform. In T. S. Popkewitz (Ed.), *Educational Knowledge: changing relationships between the state, civil society and the*

- educational community* (pp. 111-130). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Whitty, G., & Power, S. (2002a). Devolution and Choice in Three Countries. In G. Whitty (Ed.), *Making Sense of Education Policy* (pp. 46-63). London: Paul Chapman.
- Whitty, G., & Power, S. (2002b). The Overt and hidden Curricula of quasi-markets. In G. Whitty (Ed.), *Making Sense of Education Policy*. London: Paul Chapman.
- Woods, P. A., Bagley, C., & Glatter, R. (1998). *School Choice and Competition: Markets in the Public Interest?* London/New York: Routledge.
- Wu, C.-S., & Kao, C.-P. (2007). The Analysis on the Reform of Secondary Education in Taiwan: 1994-2007. *Bulletin of The National Institute of Education Resources and Research*(*教育資料集刊*), 34, 1-24.
- Wu, J., & Yang, H.-C. (1999). *Wu Jin's Thought of the Education Reform*. Taipei: Bookzone.
- Wu, N.-T. (1989). Searching the Momentum of Democratisation and the Discussion about the Research directions of Democratic Transformation. *Taiwan : A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies*(*台灣社會研究*), 2(1), 145-161.
- Wu, P.-L., Shen, C.-C., Chien, H.-C., & Hsien, L.-Y. (2008, September 5). Does Streaming Really Disappear in Junior High Schools? . *United Daily News*, p. A8.
- Wu, S.-C. (2007, August 17). Schools Lied About Using Mixed-Ability Grouping. Retired Teacher Protests. *United Daily News*, p. C2.
- Wu, W.-N. (2000). *Social Movement and Civil Society-A Case of the Civil Educational Reform After the Abolition of the Martial Law*. Unpublished master thesis, National Taiwan University, Taipei.
- Yang, C.-M., Sun, J.-H., Chang, N.-T., Chang, M.-H., Liu, C.-C., Wang, C.-C., et al. (2003, October 18). Streaming Appears again with Disguised Forms. Music and Art Talent Classes are all Streamed classes. *United Daily News*, p. B8.
- Yang, K.-S. (1976). The influence of streaming on pupils' attainments and mental health. *National Science Council Monthly*(*科學發展月刊*), 4(1), 1-27.
- Yang, K.-S., & Yeh, C.-C. (1984). Problems of "Educational Advancementism". In K.-S. Yang & C. Yeh (Eds.), *Social Problems of Taiwan*. Taipei: Chu-Liu Publishers.
- Yang, S.-K. (2001). *Dilemmas of Education Reform in Taiwan: Internationalization or Localization*. Paper presented at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society.
- Yang, S.-W. (2000). The Basic Ability and the Basic Learning Ability. *Inservice Education Bulletin*(*研習資訊*), 17(6), 16-24.
- Yang, Y.-J., & Wu, H.-L. (1995). Educational Tracking and Economic Development--Policy Analysis and Actual Effects. *The Summary of the Executive Yuan Education Reform Committee Research Conference Topic 3: Educational Tracking* Retrieved Feb, 24th, 2010, from <http://www.sinica.edu.tw/info/edu-reform/farea8/j12/35.html>

- Yang, Y.-P. (2004). Within-School Streaming means the Streaming of Teaching and Learning-Interviewing Professor Hsieh. *Humanistic Education Journal*, 185.
- Ye, Y.-B., & Lin, C.-Y. (2008). The Interpretation and the Practice of the 'Mid-Range Historical View in Annales School': An Example of the Retrospection of Taiwanese Vocational Education Policies. *Inservice Education Bulletin*(研習資訊), 23(5), 45-52.
- Yeh, S.-C. (1993). The Development of Taiwanese Elementary Education. In N.-H. Hsu (Ed.), *The Taiwanese Education History*. Taipei: ShtaBook(師大書苑).
- Yen, K.-L. (1997a). The Factors Affecting the Class Grouping in Junior High Schools and the Strategies to Cope with the Factors. *Secondary Education* (中等教育), 48(5), 3-12.
- Yen, K.-L. (1997b). The Implementation, Disputes, and the Reflection of the Junior High School Graduates Voluntarily Senior High School Entry Program. *Secondary Education* (中等教育), 48(3), 48-59.
- Yen, K.-L. (1998). The factors that influence the implementation of the mixed-ability grouping policy and the coping strategies: a policy implementation perspective. *Educational Policy Forum*(教育政策論壇), 1(1), 38-62.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (3rd ed.). London: SAGE.
- Yonezawa, S., Wells, A. S., & Serna, I. (2002). Choosing Tracks: "Freedom of Choice" in Detracking Schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 39(1), 37-67.
- Youdell, D. (2004). Engineering school markets, constituting schools and subjectivating students: the bureaucratic, institutional and classroom dimensions of educational triage. *Journal of Education Policy*, 19(4), 407-431.
- Young, M. D. (1994). *The Rise of the Meritocracy*. New Brunswick: Transaction.
- Yu, W.-W. (2006, May 13). Scholars Criticise the Burgeoning of Gifted Classes. *United Daily News*, p. C4.
- Yu, W.-W., & Chang, C.-H. (2006, May 18). Scholars Support to Stop the Gifted Classes Joint Examination. *United Daily News*, p. A7.
- Zembylas, M., & Bulmahn, B. H. (2007). Teachers' spaces for coping with change in the context of a reform effort. *Journal of Educational Change*, 8(3), 235-256.